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INSIDE THE GOVERNMENT

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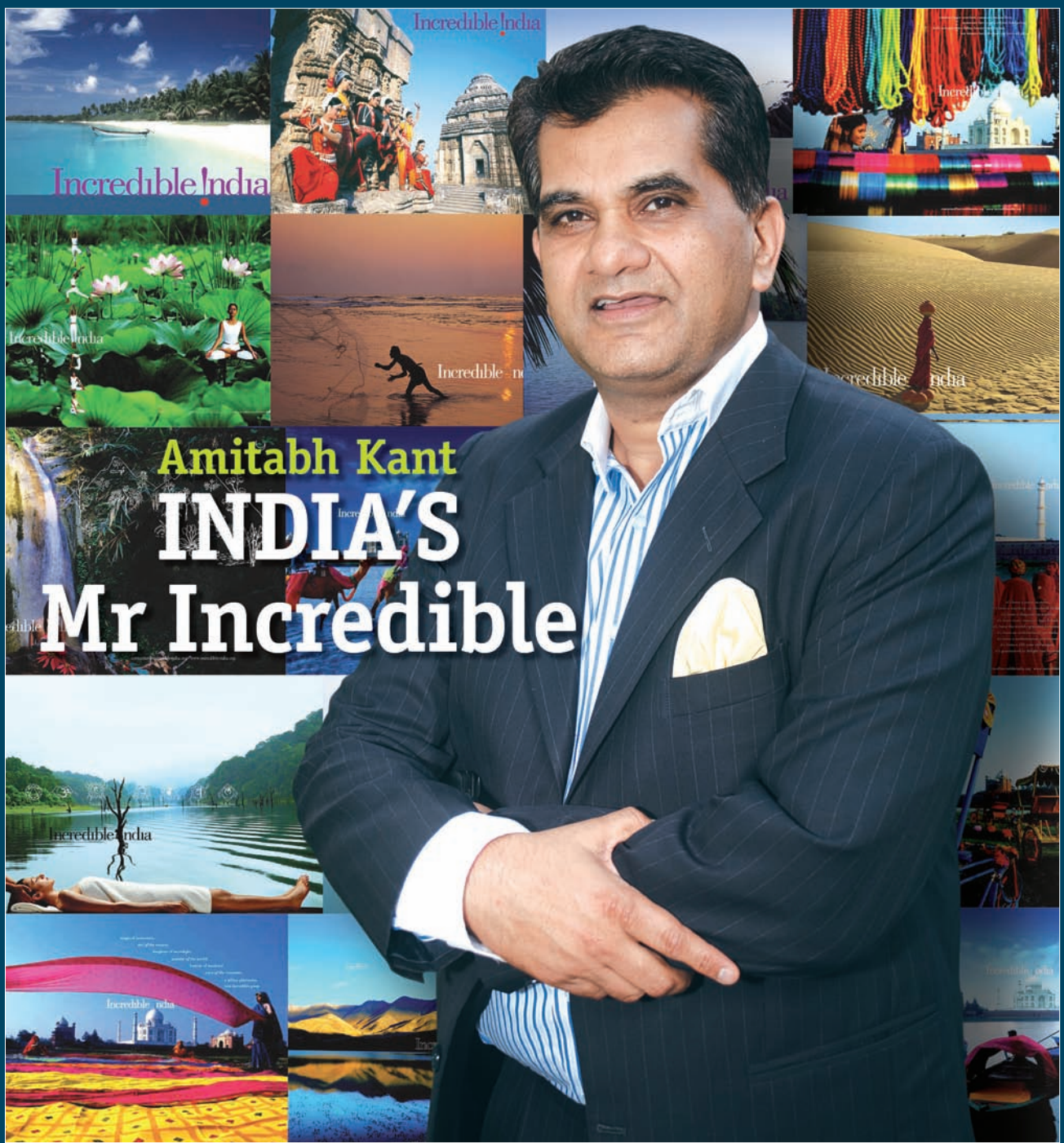

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COVER PIC: RAJEEV DABRAL

COVER STORY

talk time | amitabh kant

'Entering Agra, you see wires, hoardings, garbage, filth and lapkas'

The kingdom of Kosala – now Ballia district in eastern Uttar Pradesh – has never ceased to spawn favourite sons. The lineage includes rishis Jamadagni and Bhrigu, social activists and political leaders such as Jayaprakash Narayan, Chittu Panday, Mangal Panday, Acharya Hazari Prasad Dwivedi, Acharya Parushram Chaturvedi, and former Prime Minister Chandra Shekhar. It is to this former ancient kingdom that Amitabh Kant also belongs.

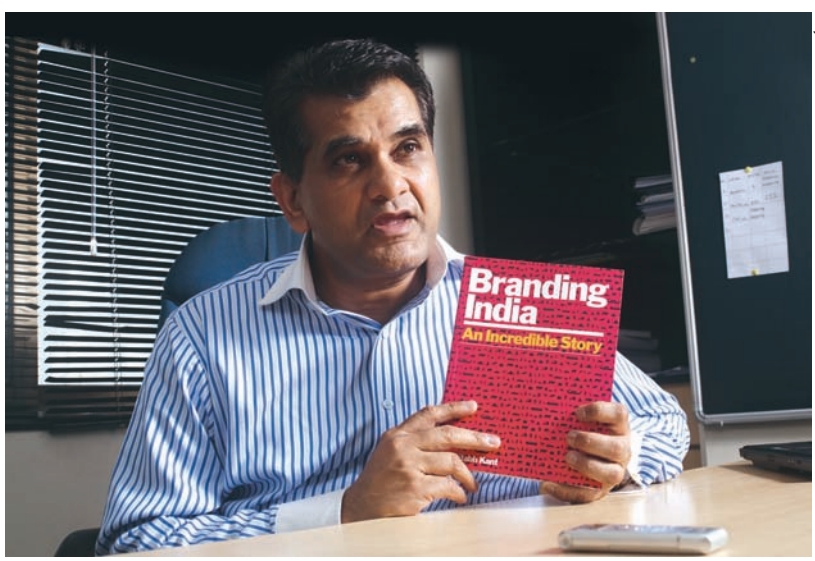
This IAS officer (1980 batch) from the Kerala cadre has been making waves with the release of his book, Branding India – An Incredible Story. *It is a vivid and compelling account of the complex and massive exercise that the author, former Joint Secretary in the Ministry of Tourism, and his colleagues, cutting across various government departments, undertook to put India – a magnificently diverse country, with 28 States, seven Union Territories, 18 official languages and 1.12 billion people – under one brand on the world tourism map. It is the behind-the-scenes story of the "Incredible India" campaign.*

Kant is passionate about his work – whether as Secretary, Tourism, Kerala or Joint Secretary, Ministry of Tourism in the Government of India, or in his current assignment as Chief Executive Officer (Additional Secretary level) of the Delhi-Mumbai Industrial Corridor, a dream project of Prime Minister Manmohan Singh. As for the book, Kant gives credit for his writing skills to his mother Dr Sita Srivastava, an eminent educationist.

interviewed by ANIL TYAGI

gfiles: *What is incredible about India?*

Amitabh Kant: The Incredible India campaign was started in the aftermath of September 11, 2001. There was a war in Afghanistan, an attack on Parliament,



RAJEEV DABRAL

'You have to improve destination management, you have to have better airports, better lighting at monuments, better signage and, above all, the best toilets'

gfiles
INSIDE THE GOVERNMENT

VOL.3, ISSUE 7 | OCTOBER 2009

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Pradeep Tyagi, Nipun Jain | FINANCES
Charanjit Kaur | HRD

CONTACT DETAILS/ADVERTISING & MARKETING
118, 2ND FLOOR, DDA SITE 1,
NEW RAJINDER NAGAR, NEW DELHI – 110 060
TEL/FAX: +91-11-28744789, +91-11-45082832,
+91-9911110385
e-mail: gfilesindia@gmail.com
www.gfilesindia.com

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From the Editor-in-Chief

WHEN observers touted the passing of the Right to Information (RTI) Act, 2005 as the Indian Parliament's greatest gift to the nation after Independence, many of us professional sceptics dismissed the claim as self-congratulatory hyperbole. So what else was new? The system would, as it always does, find a way to subvert the legislation's intent, spirit, and implementation in much the same way as it makes a mockery of Panchayati Raj, anti-dowry laws, Prevention of Corruption Act, and the myriad of anti-poverty measures that are intended to empower ordinary people against injustice and the depredations of a runaway government.

Repeatedly, we have observed in this space as well as within the columns of the magazine that the weakness of checks and balances within the Indian system of governance is responsible for the Leviathan state before which reformers and advocates of accountability quail with impotence. But, maybe, just maybe, the times, they are a-changin'.

Our very first issue featured RTI Commissioner Wajahat Habibullah on the cover. This was, by design, an editorial statement: Where better to start a magazine focused on good governance, public policy debates, and the functioning of the bureaucracy, than with RTI, a radical reform measure designed to light the wicks of grassroots democracy? Habibullah, a realist, was perfectly frank that there would be a vested interest within the bureaucracy to strangle the baby in its cradle through non-compliance and legerdemain. But he was equally hopeful that once the genie was out of the bottle it would be difficult to re-cork it. It would unleash the power of ordinary people.

Little did he know how prophetic he was. This is not to suggest that a revolution has occurred. But something significant is afoot. As correspondent Tara Patkar's report in this issue points out, the use of the RTI has already unleashed headline-making information such as the moveable and immoveable assets of UP's bureaucrats, Members of Parliament illegally occupying government bungalows, profligacy by state governments and so on.

What is astounding is that rival political parties have now begun using the RTI to expose corruption and false promises in opposition ruling groups. In a revolutionary move, a call centre in Bihar, appropriately named "Jankari", helps the rural population file RTI applications by using private or public telephones. The tide is swelling. The backlash is expected. For example, UP Chief Minister Mayawati tried to eliminate 14 subjects from RTI jurisdiction including the appointment of the Governor and Ministers, but backed off under public pressure. Even though the Union government spent a meagre Rs 2 lakhs last year on publicizing the RTI Act (and this figure was obtained under an RTI query from the Department of Personnel and Training!), and people have actually been jailed under trumped-up charges for seeking information on subjects like land reforms, the now palpable movement for transparency in government is like the tide in the affairs of men which, taken at the flood, leads on to fortune.

INDERJIT BADHWAR

LETTERS: Unless devolution of powers is implemented in right earnest, the ambitious dream of Panchayati Raj will remain elusive. The major hurdles are the mindset and attitude of our legislators and Members of Parliament who do not want to share power with the district-based politicians. *Anil Maheshwari, on blog*

I am interested in India's struggle with democracy and governance, and how it pulled through and started earning accolades. I appreciate India's success in governance and democracy, and want to

Continued on page 4

LETTERS

Continued from page 3

know how it did it.
Ogbuja Ireke, on blog

The magazine is first rate.
Laurence Leamer, biographer of Kennedy, via email

Compliments on your publication. I enjoyed some of the articles – especially those on the election process with specific reference to the EVMs and the fall (!) of Karat.
Lalit Mehra, via email

I have been a great admirer of Dr Nitish Sengupta since he was DG, Tourism and have seen and heard him on several occasions. Your excerpt from his book was very readable, describing his life. He

has been in banking, politics and so on but above all he is a good human being. Once, during a travel agents' convention, he cooled frayed tempers by saying strong feelings need not be expressed in a harsh manner.
Anil Mathur, on blog

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COVER STORY

talk time | amitabh kant

Continued from page 2

international airlines were in a shambles. There were travel advisories against India and hotels had 20-25 per cent occupancy. Inbound tour operators became outbound tour operators. The challenge was to bring back consumer demand.

At the peak of the crisis we launched the Incredible India campaign. We used the crisis as an opportunity to brand and position India in the global market. Research went into this – what market are we going to attack, what markets are we going to consolidate, what market are we going to seek for the future. We worked with the most creative minds in this field, Ogilvy & Mather, Bharat Bala. We penetrated global markets. Our arrivals then were 2.1 million. In 2008, it was 5.6 million. Domestic tourism was 220 million, now it's 518 million. Our foreign exchange earnings went up from $2.3 billon to $11.6 billion. We were able to position and brand India in the global markets through this campaign. Simultaneously, we did some domestic campaigns; we marketed north in south and east in west. This campaign basically enabled Indians to discover India.

gfiles: *This is strategy. But what is incredible about India?*

AK: CNN recently did a survey. Across Asia-Pacific, Europe and America, India emerged the richest in terms of culture and heritage. Peter Aderhold did research for the World Tourism Organization in the 1980s. He looked at 10,000 world respondents. His survey stated that 87 per cent want to see sun, sand and sea. In 2007, he used the same sample and asked what people want to do. They said they wanted to go to a country which is rich in heritage and culture, for experiential tourism. He defined those 10,000 respondents as alert, independent travellers. So from the 1980s to 2007, world tourists moved away from sun-sand-sea 5-star categories to experiential tourism. India is rich in culture and heritage, she has competitive advantage, and that is what makes India incredible and unique. The demographics of the world are changing.

Europe and America have aging populations, with 8000 people retiring per day. These people want to travel for heritage and culture only. So India has a huge market which is not tapped and that is the uniqueness of India. You have to differentiate your product and you differentiate it not by aping the West. You have to go back to your roots. Kerala became God's own country because it went back to its roots. It went back to its traditional architecture, Kathakali and Mohiniattam, appam and stew, and martial art. That is Kerala's uniqueness. That is why National Geographic Traveller said it was among the 10 exotic paradises of the world. India's uniqueness is in its heritage and cultural art forms which have to be made experiential in character. India will never become incredible by opening casinos and having night life. India's strength lies in what is unique about her, that is what a Westerner wants to discover.

gfiles: *To attract tourists, you need infrastructure. Do you see it available?*

AK: As a marketing campaign, "Incredible India" is fine. If India wants to sustain its growth, it has to make its experience credible. The key issue on the ground is the quality of experience for the tourist. The quality of experience comes from the quality of infrastructure. You can't be a first world nation if you have garbage and filth outside your heritage sites. You have to improve destination management, you have to have better airports, better lighting at monuments, better signage and, above all, the best toilets. We are in the process. A number of things are happening. Airports and highways are happening. In several places – Ajanta-Ellora, Mahabalipuram, Hampi, and Bodh Gaya, a lot of improvement has

REUTERS

'The Taj Mahal is extremely well managed as far as the sites of the Archaeological Survey of India are concerned. But tourists come not just to the Taj Mahal, they come to Agra. We have failed to manage civic governance of Agra'

taken place in infrastructure.

gfiles: *In 62 years, we are unable to manage one of the world's major monuments, the Taj Mahal. Its backyard is stinking and filthy. You can't touch the Yamuna water.*

AK: The Taj Mahal is extremely well managed as far as the sites of the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) are concerned. But tourists come not just to the monument, they come to Agra. We have failed to manage civic governance of Agra city. As you enter Agra city you see wires, hoardings, garbage, filth and *lapka*s at the railway station. With that experience, you go to the Taj Mahal which is an overwhelming site.

gfiles: *Civic responsibility lies with the state government. It means there is no coordination between the Centre and the State.*

AK: Tourism by nature is multisectoral. It cuts across various sectors. Tourism happens, whether it is Malaysia, Thailand, Singapore, because there are excellent roads, airports, brilliant signages and hotel infrastructure. There was good connectivity by air. Tourism is a civilization issue. The ownership of it has to be taken over by every department of the government, starting from the Home Ministry and including all Ministries, all State governments, and especially municipalities. They all have to become owners of tourism. When this happens in this country, tourism will take off. People must understand tourism is a multiplier of employment and growth.

gfiles: *You are very emotional on this subject. When one goes to Varanasi, Agra, Hardwar, Allahabad, one is ashamed.*

AK: I agree. I showed the problems of Varanasi in one of my presentations. After showing garbage and filth, I also said there is nothing to feel despondent about. We are a young nation. It is not that work has not happened. We have done a lot in Hampi, Mahabalipuram – it should have a demonstrative impact on other places. The Ministry of Tourism cannot take over local governance in a federal structure. The latest study by the world tourism body stated that the highest growth of employment will come from tourism.

Baron Haussmann, mayor of Paris during Napoleon's time, from 1853 to 1870, made Paris the symbol of national pride, the greatest city in the world. That became the inspiration for other French cities. Look at how Italy has developed. Italy is full of heritage and culture. Italy is the best example of tourism. The political realization that tourism drives employment is now coming in, in Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan and so on.

gfiles: *You mentioned small countries. India is a large, federally managed country.*

AK: Kerala today generates its employment through tourism. Other states should also realize tourism creates employment. When I went to Bodh Gaya, the road was full of potholes. The entire road has been done up. At Ajanta-Ellora, there were 462 encroachments. We relocated them 3 km away. We forested the whole area; you can now go by eco-friendly buses. These have become demonstration sites, other places can replicate. Every State should create a model of two heritage sites, which must give you a holistic experience from the point of arrival to point of departure. Tourism is a state subject. It is happening in every state now.

gfiles: *How does the Centre fund the States for tourism?*

AK: The Centre funds States for tourism infrastructure. The implementation is largely done by State government machinery. The Centre has destination development and circuit schemes.

gfiles: *UP has neglected tourism, messed it up....*

AK: I was Joint Secretary in the Ministry of Tourism for five-and-a-half years. I saw 16 Secretaries of Tourism in the state. No Secretary stayed more than three to four months. There is no political and administrative commitment for growth of tourism in UP. It has the potential to be India's number one destination. There is no focus on improving the infrastructure on the ground, which is why Varanasi has turned into one of the filthiest cities of the country.

gfiles: *What is the motto of our tourism? Earning money? Or you want to show the great nation of India? What class of tourist do you want?*

AK: We were not looking for mass tourism. It puts pressure on infrastructure, which is already constrained. We need to bring in discerning travellers, the upmarket tourist. They come to

'The ownership of tourism has to be taken over by every department of the government... When this happens in this country, tourism will take off'

Rajasthan, Goa and Kerala. We need to bring other states into this fold of growth. Incredible India is a mother brand; we need to create sub-brands. So, if an incident happens in Mumbai, the brand of Madhya Pradesh, Kerala, Northeast should not suffer.

gfiles: *You say only four states have come up as tourist destinations. Why have Gujarat, Maharashtra, Orissa and Andhra Pradesh not come up too?*

AK: Several states have focused on industrialization. They have focused on their core competence. Some, like Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh, focused on information technology. Now they realize that the next era will be one of culture and tourism.

gfiles: *You are talking about expansion of this industry, but where is the trained human resource?*

AK: One of India's least talked of success stories is the creating of world-standard human resources for this industry. The Indian Institute of Hospitality and Management (IIHM) produces the world's best trained manpower for tourism and hospitality.

gfiles: *But what about unorganized HR like taxidrivers, rickshawwallahs, guides, bus drivers....?*

AK: When we were doing the Incredible India campaign, we realized one of the major obstacles involved taxidrivers, guides, and immigration staff. We then launched the parallel campaign, *Atithi devo bhave*. We started with seven cities and finally included 15 cities. We trained taxidrivers, guides, and immigration and customs staff so that they became ambassadors of India. We did certification programmes.

gfiles: *What is to be done to spread the tourism concept to States?*

AK: The key drivers of tourism are connectivity, civic governance, communication strategy (which needs to be constantly innovated), emphasis in terms of improving the destination experience on the ground. If this happens, a sense of national pride will come in the states.

gfiles: *What tourism sector does India lack most?*

AK: There is huge potential for India to emerge in a sector called Meetings, Incentive, Conventions and Exhibitions (MICE) tourism. If a Convention Centre is developed in four or five cities, India will host all the meetings of the world. We have not been able to develop any except one in Hyderabad.

gfiles: *Which countries are most interested, especially after the Incredible India campaign?*

AK: The traditional markets are in Europe – France, Germany and Italy – and now America. These are long-haul markets. We don't have short-haul tourists. We don't get tourists from Pakistan. In Europe short-haul tourists are there but we don't get them. India has to make itself a destination for Southeast Asia. We should focus on Thailand, Malaysia, Singapore and Indonesia. China, by 2020, will be the biggest outbound market in the world. It has a hundred million outbound tourists. In coming years, we have to focus on the markets in China, Russia, Japan and Brazil.

gfiles: *What about Latin America and Africa?*

AK: Latin America is geographically very far. Direct air connectivity from this market is not very good. Air connectivity from Europe and America has improved a lot.

gfiles: *How do you see the tourism industry in 2020?*

AK: India should not look at numbers. The World Tourism Organization predicted that India, by 2020, will have about eight million tourists. I hope we will pass this figure in 2010. The challenge for 2020 is that tourism should be the key driver for India's economy for both economic growth and employment. The highest multiplier effect on employment should come from tourism. It should be a creator of hard and soft jobs in India. If that realization comes in the minds of politicians, then travel and tourism will take off.

gfiles: *What about your current task as CEO, Delhi-Mumbai Industrial Corridor Development Corporation?*

AK: The DMIC seeks to create a strong economic base with globally competitive environment and state-of-the-art infrastructure to activate local commerce, enhance foreign investments and attain sustainable development. The DMIC is to be developed on either side of the Western Dedicated Freight Corridor of Ministry of Railways within a band of 150-200 km. It aims at doubling employment potential, tripling industrial output and quadrupling exports from the region in the first five years. g

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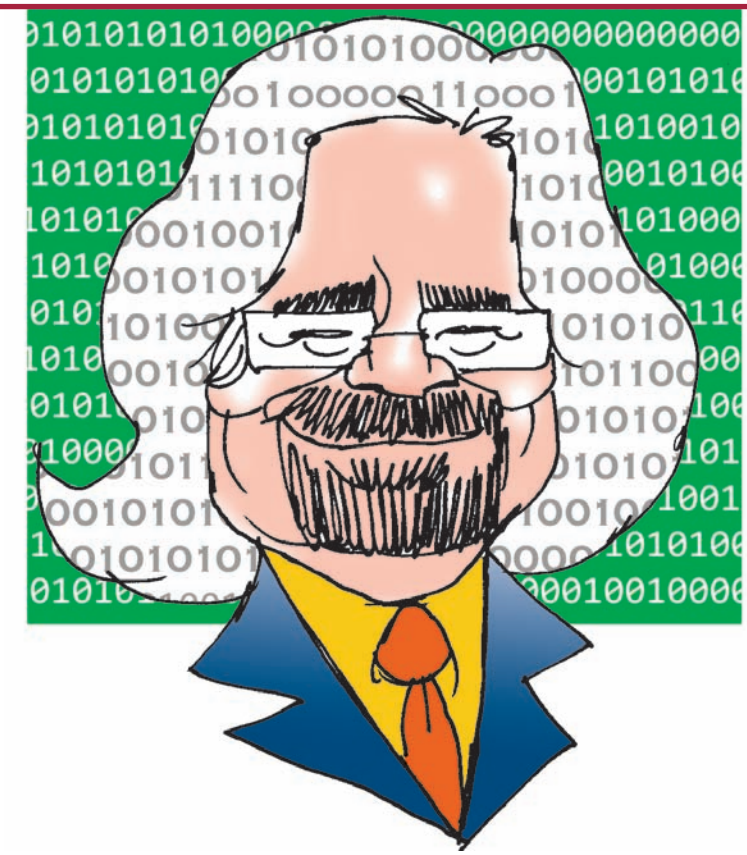
ECOLOGY OUR MISSION OUR OBSESSION

Play it again, Sam
pitroda's back in circulation



SAM Pitroda needs no introduction, having played a stellar role during the Prime Ministership of Rajiv Gandhi. Urged by the late PM, his contribution to giving a mighty push to taking communication to every nook and corner of the country coupled with bringing about an IT revolution cannot be undermined. Now, he seems to be making his presence felt once again – evoking the name of Congress General Secretary and Prime Minister-in-waiting Rahul Gandhi. Recently, there has been a steady stream of Ministers and other VIPs queuing to meet him in his chamber in a posh hotel. Everyone emerges overawed, hoping to catch the eye or ear of the young Gandhi.

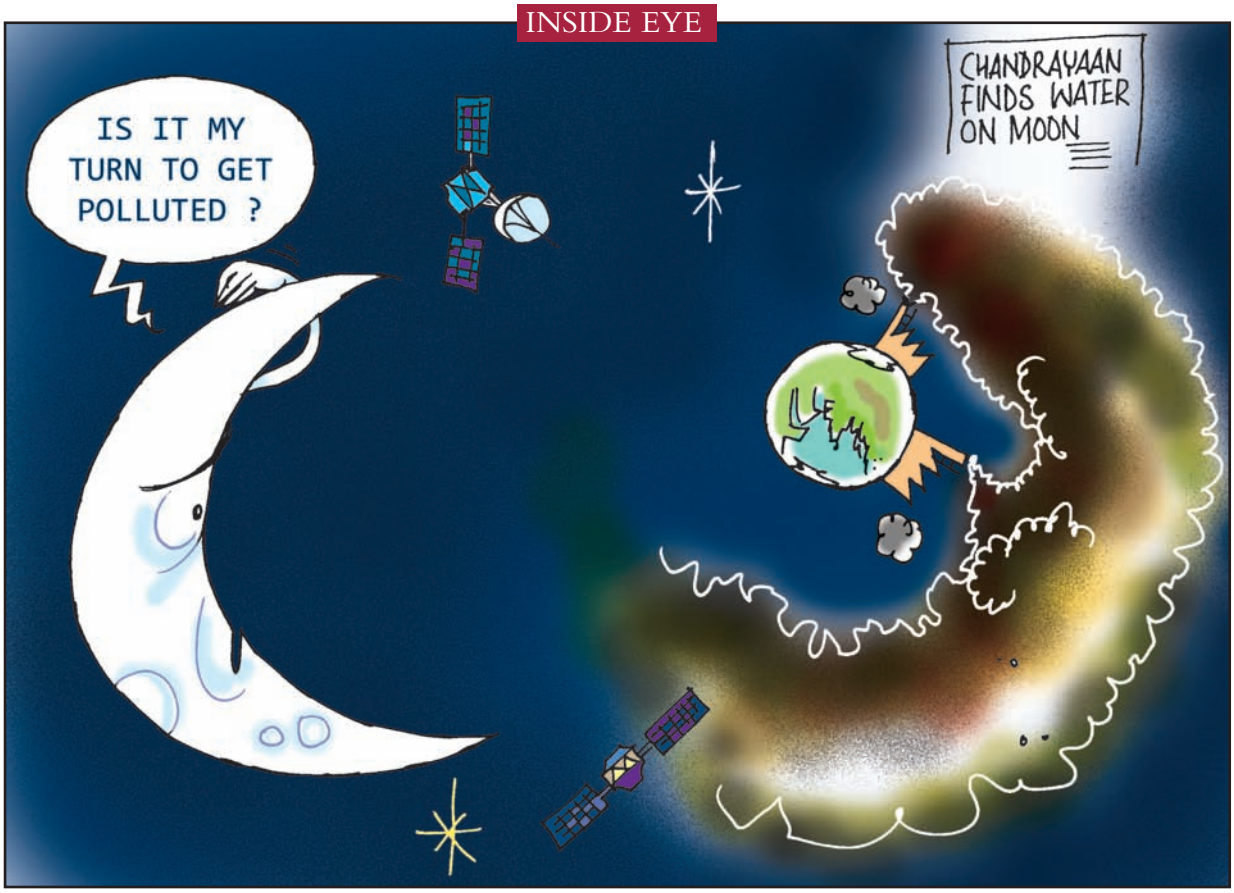
Rahul's latest coming of age
meetings with mediapersons

AFTER an extended apprenticeship to understand the complex political environment of the country, Rahul Gandhi is finally confident of fielding questions from senior scribes. He has reportedly held a two-hour meeting with about half-a-dozen editors of premier Hindi dailies recently. Before that, he met the owner-editors of major TV news channels. These sessions with mediapersons were characterized as purely background briefings about the goings-on in the AICC and party organizational matters. Obviously, all this is part of his strenuous exercise to derive a proper perspective of national politics. Does this mean that Sonia Gandhi, who earlier held these interfaces with mediapersons, will now keep a lower profile?

The omni-absent Minister!
azhagiri's rarely in delhi

THE Prime Minister's Office has written to the Fertilizers Ministry asking why there is such a delay in convening the Group of Ministers meeting on fertilizer subsidy. The problem has primarily arisen because of the long absences from Delhi of Union Fertilizers Minister MK Azhagiri, son of DMK supremo and Tamil Nadu CM M Karunanidhi.

Finance Minister Pranab Mukherjee has been asking for the note on fertilizer subsidy, on the basis of which the GOM can be convened. The note can be cleared only when Azhagiri appends his signature to it. There is frustration all around because



ILLUSTRATIONS: ARUNA

Azhagiri is never available, being in Chennai most of the time. His priorities lie in Tamil Nadu where brother MK Stalin has a clear edge over him in the chief ministerial stakes.

Priyanka reviewing Rajiv Foundation changes in the offing

PRIYANKA Gandhi Vadra has become very active with the Rajiv Gandhi Foundation and is attending office regularly. However, as a result of this, some IAS officers of the rank of Joint Secretary on deputation to the Foundation and those connected with the media who were well past the age of superannuation have had to bid adieu to the organization. It is apparent that a new, younger generation has entrenched itself in the Foundation.

There is also hushed talk that Priyanka's participation means some radical changes are on the cards. The Foundation was established in June 1991 to commemorate Rajiv Gandhi's vision for India. It works in areas that were of deepest concern to him, acting as a catalyst to promote effective, practical and sustainable programmes of national development. g

Manmohan Singh inaugurating the Chief Ministers' conference...

NETTING THE BIG

Anti-corruption Bills have repeatedly failed to become law b

by MG Devasahayam

IN recent weeks, big guns have been booming against "corruption in high places", creating an impression that at long last the debilitating cancer afflicting India's governance and society is meeting its nemesis and the *aam aadmi* can look forward to good and honest governance in the near future.

The Prime Minister himself led the charge while addressing a conference attended by CBI and state anti-corruption officials: "High-level corruption should be pursued aggressively. There is a pervasive feeling that while petty cases get tackled quickly, the big fish escape punishment. This has to change." Newspaper headlines promptly screamed: "PM on corruption: 'Big fish' must not escape punishment".

But it appears the Prime Minister was more concerned about image makeover for attracting foreign investment than genuine effort towards good governance for the common man. This was evident from what he said next: "Pervasive corruption in our country tarnishes our image. It also discourages investors, who expect fair treatment and transparent dealings."

Then came the Chief Justice of India, firing all cylinders. He sought confiscation of assets of persons convicted of offences under the Prevention of Corruption Act. Speaking at the national seminar on "Fighting Crimes Related to Corruption," organized by the CBI and the National Institute of Criminology and Forensic Science, he said: "The rationale behind the same is that if a public official amasses wealth at the cost of the public, then the state is justified in seizing such assets."

The irony of it is that the higher judiciary, of which the CJI is the head, is itself enmeshed in endless controversies over corruption and wealth amassed by judges, its declaration under the Right to Information Act and elevation of people accused of mass accumulation of assets to the apex court. Pathologically corrupt public officials could well retort, "Physician, heal thyself."

The Union Minister for Law and Justice went a step further and called for amending Articles 309, 310 and 311 of the Constitution, thus removing protection and safeguards in prosecuting corrupt public servants: "There is a feeling that the protection given to the public servants under Article 311 of the Constitution is being used to create obstacles for expeditious punitive action." True, but who will bell the cat!

"Big fish" includes Ministers, Members of Parliament and other Constitutional functionaries who wield enormous power and influence without corresponding accountability or rules to regulate their conduct. The institutions of Lokpal and Lokayukt were aimed precisely at reining in such big fish.

The basic idea of the Lokpal is borrowed from the office of Ombudsman, which has played an effective role in checking corruption and wrong-doing in Scandinavian and other countries. In the early 1960s, mounting corruption in public administration set the winds blowing in favour of an Ombudsman in

It appears the Prime Minister was more concerned about image makeover for attracting foreign investment than genuine effort towards good governance

THE WATCHDOG RE M

THE Lokpal was visualized as the watchdog institution on probity of Members of Parliament and Ministers (including the Prime Minister) by investigating corruption cases against political persons at the Central level. The Lokpal is to be a three-member body with a chairperson who is or has been a Chief Justice or Judge of the Supreme Court; its two other members are or have been Judges or Chief Justices of High Courts around the country. The chairperson and members shall be

PHOTOS: PIB

...Chief Justice Balakrishnan with CBI boss Kumar: firing on all cylinders?

FISH ISN'T EASY

w because of the clout of venal, dishonest public servants

India too. The Administrative Reforms Commission set up in 1966 recommended the constitution of two-tier machinery – a Lokpal at the Centre, and Lokayuktas in the States. These institutions were meant to remove the sense of injustice from the minds of adversely affected citizens and instil public confidence in the efficacy and honesty of the governance machinery.

After 40 years, such eminent "watchdog institutions" conceived as public bulwark against corruption in high places are either non-starters or non-functional. There are only seminars and speeches. While the venal and the corrupt stride this land like colossi, dominating its political, administrative, judicial and business spectrum, the conscientious and the honest shrink and fade away. This is India's true tragedy.

The Gandhian Satyagraha Brigade, the rejuvenated version of the Lok Sevak Sangh of Servants of the People Society led by the 92-year-old Shambhu Dutta – a freedom fighter of Quit India Movement vintage – has been spearheading a crusade for immediate appointment of the Lokpal. Dutta has lost count of the times he has written to the Prime Minister in the past five years. His appeals have evoked no response and, in utter frustration, he has decided to offer the "supreme sacrifice" by going on a fast unto death from October 2 or Gandhi Jayanti.

When I met him recently, the Gandhian was anguished over the Prime Minister's inaction (or inability) on this national issue of grave importance. He recalled the Common Minimum Programme of the first UPA government that had promised enactment of the Lokpal Bill into law and the categorical declaration of Manmohan Singh at the All-India Lokayukta Conference in September 2004 that "the UPA Government will lose no time to enact the Lokpal Bill, shoved aside after being tabled in Parliament at least eight times in the past three decades". Manmohan Singh did bring up the Bill in the Cabinet twice but some UPA ministers, undergoing trials in courts, did not allow the matter to proceed. Such is the enormity of India's political chicanery.

In 1928, Mahatma Gandhi made a scintillating forecast: "Corruption will be out one day, however much one may try to conceal it: and the public can as its right and duty, in every case of justifiable suspicion, call its servants to strict account, dismiss them, sue them in a law court, or appoint an arbitrator or inspector to scrutinize their conduct, as it likes."

Eight decades on, the utopia the Mahatma predicted is nowhere in sight. Instead, like a malignant cancer, corruption is eating into the vitals of our nation. The question is, are we condemned to be a country of hypocrites with the voice of the "naked fakir" remaining a cry in the wilderness? g

E MAINS UNBORN

appointed on the recommendation of a high-level committee under the Vice-President and including the Prime Minister and Leader of the Opposition.

The Lokpal Bill was introduced and passed in the fourth Lok Sabha in 1968-69. While it was pending in the Rajya Sabha, the Lok Sabha was dissolved, resulting in the first death of the Bill. It was revived in 1971, 1977, 1985, 1989, 1996, 1998, 2001, 2005 and 2008. Each Bill was referred to some committee or other for "improvements" and before the government could take a final call on the issue the House was dissolved.

Though Lokayuktas have been constituted in 17 states, their power, function and jurisdiction are not uniform. Deliberate lacunae have been left in legislation creating the office, apparently to keep the elected representatives outside meaningful jurisdiction of the Lokayukta even when the laws appear to include them. Lokayuktas have no independent investigative machinery and are dependent on the government agencies, thereby making these Ombudsman-type bodies virtually non-functional.

Urban cowboy or

The occurrence, and routine acceptability, of extra-judicial killings s

by Col R Hariharan

AN Ahmedabad metropolitan magistrate has held that the June 2004 encounter in which alleged terrorists – Ishrat Jahan and three others – were killed was stage-managed by the Gujarat police. Another news story from Chennai hinted at the custodial death of Rajan who was caught by the public and handed over to the police after he carried out a daylight killing. The police claimed his death was due to grievous injuries suffered in the hands of the public. However, the post-mortem report contradicted this.

These two seemingly different news stories had a common thread – extra-judicial killings by policemen. "Encounter killing" – a euphemism for unlawful killing by policemen – is not rare in India. Usually, when the news story is put out, not only the police but also the state government draws media flak. At times, the ruling party is also drawn into the controversy. Civil society action keeps pace with the media coverage.

Usually, after the noise dies down, the media jumps to hardy perennials – stories on one of the Bollywood Khans or the latest immature act of a "crorepathi" cricketer. The encounter killing is forgotten till it develops into a more juicy one. And the cycle continues – nothing seemingly changes for the police, politicians, governments or even the victims. The media response is neither uniform nor even-handed. In the Ishrat Jahan case, most of the media has already found the BJP-ruled government and its Chief Minister, Narendra Modi, guilty as

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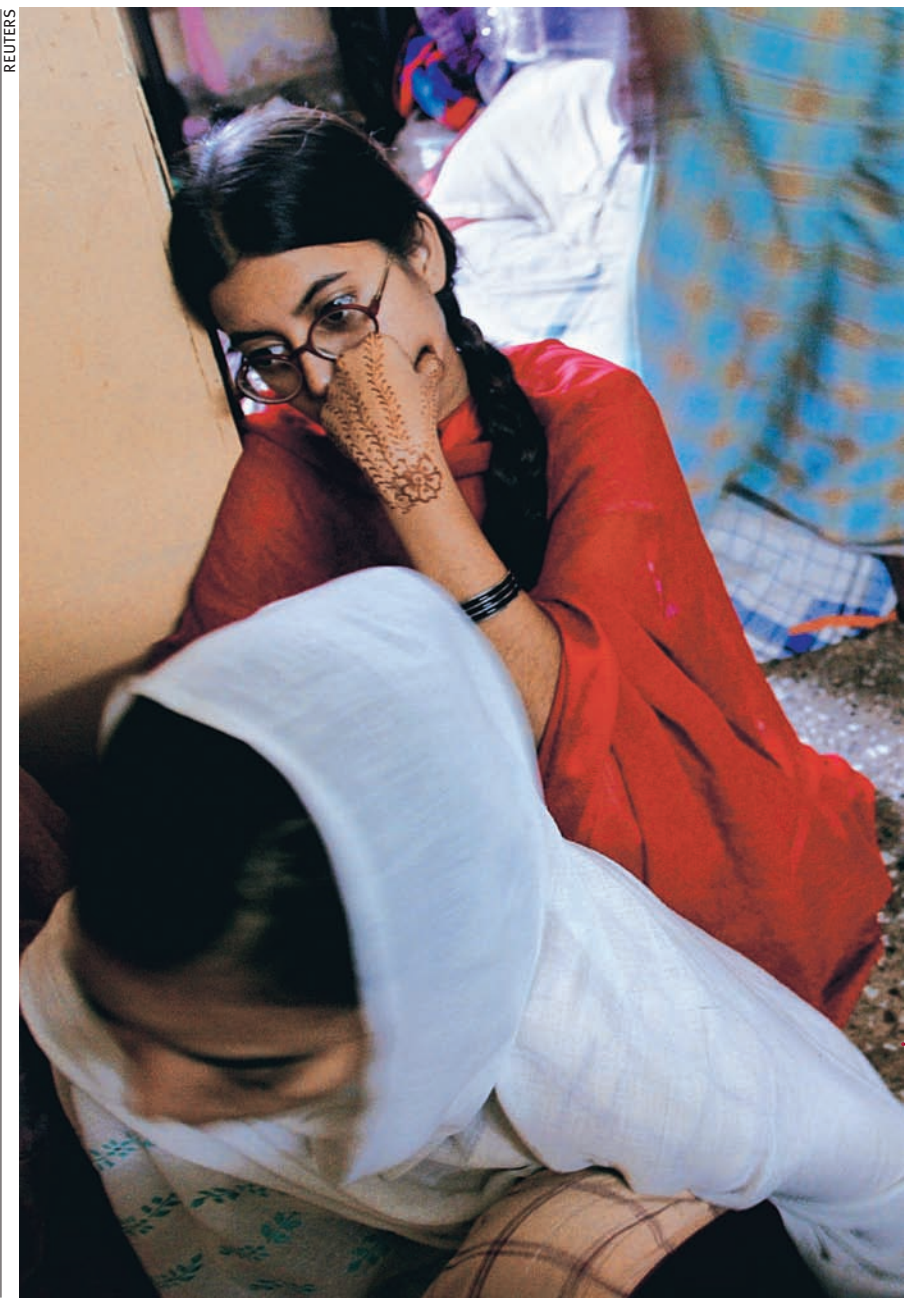


r arm of the law?

s stem from both politicization and a colonial legacy

there has been one too many encounter killings reported from Gujarat.

But it may not be the same for the Tamil Nadu government, which has its own gory record of encounter killings. In 2005, the Justice Sadashiva Committee had indicted the Special Task Force (STF) of Karnataka and Tamil Nadu for killing 66 tribals in "encounters" when they were hunting out Veerappan. But in the Rajan death, Tamil Nadu is a little better placed because he was not termed a terrorist. Moreover, the state is led by the aging M Karunanidhi who keeps the media humoured, despite a few skeletons rattling in his party's cupboard. So Rajan's killing may not set the media on fire.

Although many of the deaths in police shootouts and in custody are genuine, in public belief any death in police custody or transit is a cover-up of an extra-judicial killing. In spite of this, there is public inertia in reacting strongly against police misconduct. There is probably a cynical acceptance of unlawful killings by policemen as an inevitable part of the system. The perception appears to be universal. But police forces in the West have in-built structural mechanisms to check police misconduct and punish the culprits. This is not the case in South Asia.

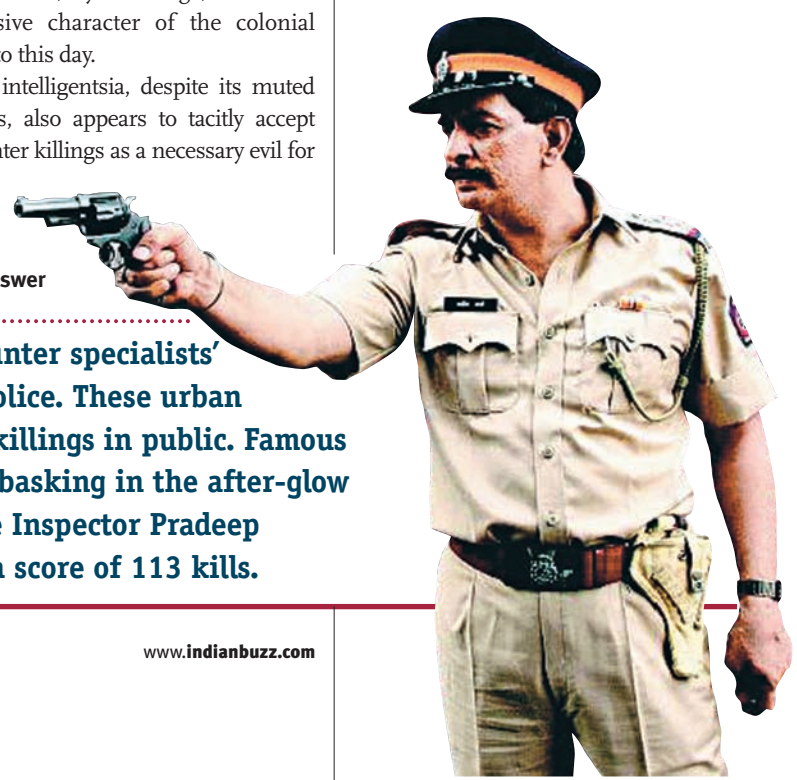
Police forces in colonial parts of South Asia are a legacy of the British Raj. During the Raj, coercive power of the police was a vital instrument of state policy after the Congress party emerged as a political threat to British rule in the 1930s. The police started equating force with authority and made political defiance a crime. This policy orientation bred lack of accountability for police actions. It reinforced the paramilitary character of colonial police.

AFTER the British quit South Asia, India, Pakistan (including its eastern wing) and Sri Lanka retained the colonial administrative, police and judicial structures without the changes essential to meet the needs of an independent nation. Thus their police forces, by and large, retain the repressive character of the colonial police to this day.

The intelligentsia, despite its muted protests, also appears to tacitly accept encounter killings as a necessary evil for controlling rapidly criminalizing society. This attitude has grown out of the seeming inability of rulers to get criminals convicted. Criminals develop political clout as they grow in notoriety. They can bribe their way through. And they can intimidate witnesses from giving evidence against them. Even when witnesses give evidence, they can be "persuaded" to turn hostile. There is no worthwhile witness protection system and rarely does the judiciary penalize witnesses for retracting. In this environment, it is not too difficult for the accused to be acquitted for want of evidence.

So execution of such criminals in police shootouts, whether fake or real, is often silently approved by the public as a mode of delivering speedy justice. That was how the public accepted the wholesale extra-judicial killing of suspected Naxalites in Calcutta in the 1970s, and

Grieving sisters of Ishrat Jahan: the state must answer



A new genre of 'encounter specialists' has emerged in the police. These urban cowboys flaunt their killings in public. Famous encounter specialists basking in the after-glow of anti-heroes include Inspector Pradeep Sharma (right) with a score of 113 kills.

the encounter killings of Sikh extremists in Punjab in the 1980s. In the late 1990s, the Bombay Police cleaned up the criminal underworld dogging the city in a series of encounter killings. Delhi Police adopted the same method to curb interstate criminal activity in the capital. And, in Andhra Pradesh, Chhattisgarh and Jharkhand, there have been frequent reports of encounter killings of Naxalites.

A new genre of "encounter specialists" – yet another phrase of Indian coinage – has emerged in the police. These urban cowboys flaunt their killings in public. Famous encounter specialists basking in the after-glow of anti-heroes include Inspector Pradeep Sharma with a score of 113 kills. Bollywood movie-makers have cashed in on the morbid public fascination with such "encounters" by producing movies woven around the theme of custodial killings.

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Ishrat's funeral procession: call to conscience?

The intelligentsia, despite its protests, appears to tacitly accept encounter killings as a necessary evil for controlling rapidly criminalizing society. This attitude grows out of the seeming inability of rulers to get criminals convicted.

POLITICAL parties have an opportunistic attitude to aberrations in policing, conditioned by popular perceptions, depending upon whether they are in power or not. The Congress, on coming to power after Independence, had no alternative people-oriented model for replacing the colonial administrative and judicial structure. So, in spite of the liberal democratic character of the Constitution, beyond pious pronunciation, there has been little value addition in redesigning the overall administrative structure. Not only the Congress, but all parties, including the Communists in West Bengal, have continued to use the police force as an instrument of power. As a result, systemic improvements have been few in the administration of law and order, and criminal justice.

Two watershed events affected the working of the police. First was the formation of non-Congress state governments in 1967 when the Congress was in power at the Centre. The widening divergence between the Centre and the State triggered the process of politicization of the police. The Centre used its intelligence apparatus for collecting political intelligence in the states. The Union government started to increase the strength of the Central police forces as its intervention in the state for political or other reasons became frequent.

The process of politicization of police at the Centre became a reality when the Emergency was imposed. As KS Subramanian noted, "The Police faced the 'Nuremberg dilemma' on whether or not to implement illegal orders by persons in political authority." By the end of the Emergency, politicization of the police was almost complete and there was no going back.

The policemen in the states serve their tenures based on the whims of politicians; police postings for "lucrative" *thanas* are routinely sold to the highest bidder. In this environment, encounter killings – for that matter, all lawless activities – appear to have a political link. Can committed policemen escape this no-win situation? Union Home Minister P Chidambaram, addressing the annual conference of Directors-General and Inspectors-General of Police on September 14, asked them why they remain silent when arbitrary postings and transfers are made by the state government. The answer is very simple; the DGPs themselves are knocked around like footballs by political masters. If the Home Minister wants results, he should start with Congress-ruled states to enforce his advice on police reforms.

The starting point is freeing law enforcement and administration of criminal justice caught in the politician-corrupt bureaucracy (including policemen)-criminal nexus. Encounter killings will die a natural death when the rule of law is applied uniformly. That requires a society determined to cleanse itself; and it is not impossible. But where is the leadership to motivate and take the people through this process? g

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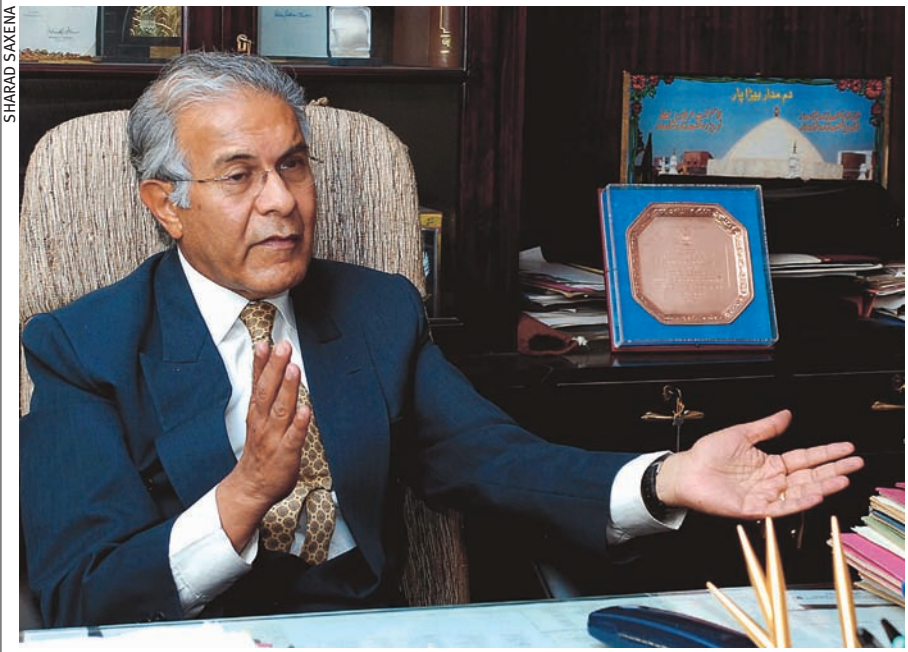
RTI is becoming a weapon for government accountability n

Storming the B


SHARAD SAXENA

Chief Information Commissioner Wajahat Habibullah attributed the tendency among officials to conceal information to the British Raj mindset. Over 50 countries now have freedom of information laws and another 15-20 are actively considering adopting one.

by Tara Patkar

THESE headlines in UP newspapers show that the power of governance has at last reached the doorstep of the common man, never mind that it has taken six decades. The enactment of the Right to Information Act, 2005 was a truly historic event, giving citizens the right to access information "held by or under control of" the public authorities. The Act sought to establish transparency as the norm and secrecy as an exception in the working of every public authority. This will contain corruption and ensure accountability to the governed.

However, the RTI is also being put to use by various people to serve their own ends. In the recent Madhya Pradesh Assembly elections, Opposition politicians, especially of the Congress, resorted to the RTI to gather information about the BJP Ministers for use in the poll campaign. Members of the Bahujan Samaj Party and Samajwadi Party called it an innovative idea, which they too would use in the next elections. Congresswoman Jamuna Devi, Leader of the Opposition in the Assembly, took the lead in employing RTI to collect information about the omissions and commissions of the BJP Ministers. She called RTI a powerful weapon to expose the corruption and false promises of the ruling BJP. The Congress splashed the information gathered through RTI in election advertisements and posters.

The scenario repeated itself in UP where the Congress created an RTI cell under the dynamic Shailendra Singh, former provincial police services officer, and started a campaign against the Mayawati government. This helped the Congress gain much momentum in the Parliamentary election, winning 21 seats.

These instances have shown that till now the people lacked a means to haul up the administration and political leaders. The RTI has filled this gap. It is also serving to educate the common man

ty not only for citizens but also in the arsenal of politicians against opponents

Bureaucratic BASTILLE

about his rights.

Initiative is also being shown by those on the other side of the divide. A call centre in Patna, aptly named Jankari, helps the rural population of Bihar to file RTI applications and get information from all government departments in Bihar. Members of the public can submit RTI applications by dialling 155311. The call centre executives draft the applications and send them to the authorities.

DURING the two years of its existence, the call centre has received 22,600 calls of which 7,070 were to submit applications under RTI, 3016 for filing first appeal and 1,400 for filing second appeals before the State Information Commission, according to Amir Subhani, Principal Secretary, Personnel. The number of applications from rural areas was less than the number from Patna. Subhani admitted that this was due to not enough effort being made to disseminate awareness about the programme and also the poor connectivity of BSNL landlines. Remedial steps are being taken.

Bihar is the first state to implement the Jankari project, the brainchild of Chief Minister Nitish Kumar. The state won the national e-governance award for 2008-09 for this initiative.

In UP, RTI has also been in the news for other reasons. The state's Chief Information Commissioner (CIC), MA Khan, was suspended by the Governor for alleged misconduct and irregularities in some appointments. Then, the file recommending Ram Kumar, a controversial retired IAS officer, for the CIC's post was returned by Governor TV Rajeswar who asked the state government to reconsider its decision. Rajeswar said Ram Kumar's appointment would go against the spirit of a Constitutional post. He is the only IAS officer in UP whose services were terminated on charges of corruption and possession of disproportionate assets. But the new CIC, Ranjeet Singh Pankaj, is also a tainted bureaucrat and a PIL against his appointment has been filed with the Lucknow bench of Allahabad High Court.

The Mayawati government also tried to eliminate 14 subjects from RTI jurisdiction, including appointment of the Governor and Ministers, and the latter's code of conduct. After strong protests from all corners, the decision was rescinded. Now the State Information Commission is inundated with appeals and complaints. Till March 2009 it had admitted 67,346 appeals and complaints, including 32,025 cases filed in 2008. Information Commissioner Gyanendra Sharma points out that people approach the SIC in frustration over the indifferent attitude of government departments.

Yet, lack of publicity remains a major loophole in the effective implementation of this Act. A recent survey conducted in 10 states by a group of voluntary bodies claimed that over a fourth of government officials designated for disseminating information under the RTI Act were unaware of their duty.

An RTI application filed by activist Subhash Chandra Agrawal revealed that the Centre spent a paltry Rs 2 lakh on publicity about the RTI Act last year through DAVP/ Prasar Bharti. It was also revealed that there were no plans to spend the Rs 300 crore allotted earlier for the purpose. Money has been spent on photo advertisements for publicity of political rulers.

At a recent two-day RTI workshop in Lucknow, the UP Chief Secretary joined rights activists in the demand for the RTI Act to be given more teeth and stat-

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RTI exposes Rs 52-crore expenditure: Mayawati's white elephants

ed that the government was ready to provide any information. "I have advised all government departments to keep their doors open to anyone seeking information under the RTI Act, which is a law to protect the interests of common people. People in government must realize that they will also be like ordinary citizens once they retire. Therefore they must put themselves in the shoes of the common man while dealing with RTI requests," he said.

Chief Information Commissioner Wajahat Habibullah, who was the chief guest at the workshop, attributed the tendency among officials to conceal information to the British Raj mindset. Over 50 countries now have freedom of information laws and another 15-20 are actively considering adopting one, he pointed out.

Unfortunately, despite RTI's successes, there are innumerable blots. In Bihar, bureaucrats have learnt to respond to RTI with harassment. Purushottam Prasad of Nalanda district had sought details of land reforms, and was implicated in a false case of theft of kerosene drums. Retired Armyman Chandradeep Singh spent 23 days in jail, charged with attempting to rape a woman in Maner under Patna district. He had sought information about the murders of his son and daughter from the police.

A call centre in Patna, aptly named Jankari, helps the rural population of Bihar to file RTI applications and get information from all government departments in the state

ACCORDING to Parveen Amanullah, co-ordinator of the Bihar Right to Information Manch, government officials are known to lodge false cases against those who dare to expose corruption. There are at least 14 instances the Manch knows about. State Information Commissioner PN Narayanan has ordered an inquiry.

Dr Sachin Agrawal, an RTI activist from UP, knows of the harassment of a farmer, Bajrang Bahadur Singh, who filed an RTI on land reforms and allotment in Jaunpur district in 2007. He was reportedly thrashed by the then District Magistrate, Anurag Yadav, in his office. Later, the harassment was exposed and a case is pending in Allahabad High Court. The farmer cycles 90 km to attend hearings in Allahabad High Court. His appeal is also pending with the State Information Commission.

"A close study of such cases would probably show that the corrupt bureaucracy is bent on rendering the RTI Act useless," adds Agrawal, a lecturer in Jaunpur University. g

The lingua franca of back-scratching

THE year Shambhu Nath Singh became a Joint Secretary in the Ministry of Defence also saw the publication of his first Hindi poetry anthology. It was no coincidence. Ex-officio, his job was also to oversee the bulk purchase of Hindi literature for jawans posted in deserts, jungles, on islands and at high altitudes. It so happened that the first publisher who approached him with a request to buy his literary books in bulk also suggested that, since he spoke such good Hindi, he could try his hand at writing poems. The flattered officer lapped up the idea and churned out three poetry anthologies during his three-year stint.

As a norm, Hindi publishers do not entertain such manuscripts but Shambhu Nath received hefty royalty for each of the three books. They were priced at Rs 300 each (as against the usual Rs 51) and he got a cheque of Rs 9000 for every collection of 300 copies. Needless to say, the Ministry purchased the entire lot.

No one ever raised an eyebrow at this over-the-table deal because each collection was ceremoniously released by noted poets and critics in the auditoria of the India International Centre. Hindi literary columnists were in full attendance and they wrote six lines each on the ninth page of their district editions of dailies. The clippings are a part of the Ministry files.

But for school and college students who opt for Hindi, only proof-readers and paid critics read Hindi poetry. Yet, Hindi poetry anthologies continue to be published. The credit goes to the bulk purchase by the Defence Ministry, Hindi-speaking States' education departments and public libraries like one named after Raja Rammohun Roy in Kolkata. The Hindi literature procured through the public exchequer is freely distributed to state-funded libraries across the country. Poetry writing should have become a national movement by now but it doesn't need a Gallup poll to prove that no one ever pulls out these anthologies from the dusty shelves of public libraries.

The publication and purchase practice was introduced when Hindi was declared as the official language in Union government departments. The intention was to inculcate a reading habit while being entertained in the process. But no survey was ever done to collect feedback. The Sahitya Akademi should have done that. But it is more interested in publishing literature written in other Indian languages in Hindi rather than the other way round. And Hindi publishers have been going to the banks laughing.

Like all good things, Shambhu Nath's stint as Joint Secretary came to an end. He was deputed to Jharkhand but Hindi poetry continued to flow from his pen. However, when he sent his fourth manuscript to the publisher, the latter was busy cultivating Shambhu Nath's successor. After umpteen reminders from Shambhu Nath, the publisher sent a terse note asking him to explore the possibility of the Jharkhand government buying copies in bulk if the anthology were published. Thereafter, since Shambhu Nath was posted in the animal husbandry department, the publisher advised him to write on the prevalence of swine flu in animals. g

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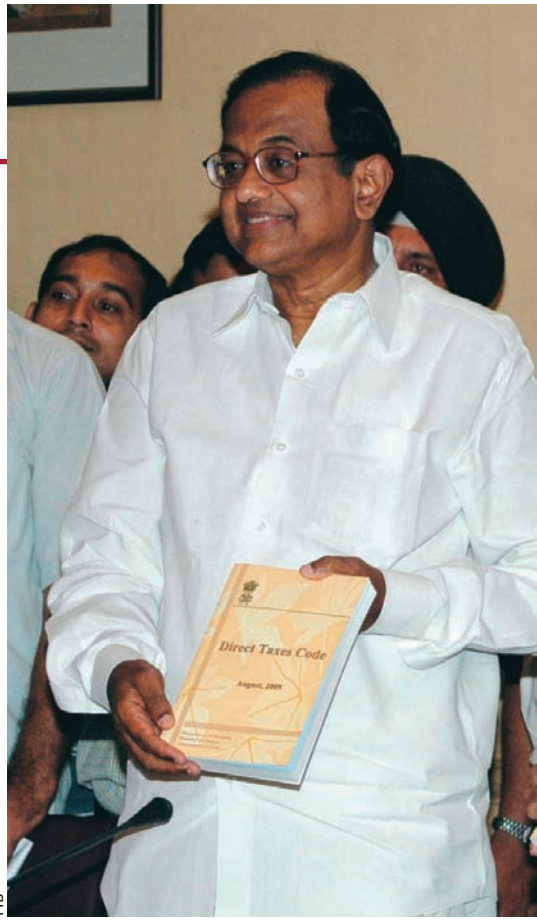
GROSS INEQUALITY OF INCOME EARNERS

The standard deduction provision should be applicable to salaried individuals who indirectly incur expenditure for earning income

by Raj Singh



PIB

Finance Minister Mukherjee (right) and Chidambaram releasing direct taxes code

INCOME tax can be a very iniquitous method of raising revenue if the tax provisions result in unfair and unequal treatment of different individuals in similar economic circumstances. Yet, the existing income tax structure is riddled with anomalies which make the system unfair. It taxes far more than proportionately the income of salaried persons. The burden of income tax on such employees is much more, compared to other categories of taxpayers.

Those who framed our income tax laws provided certain provisions specifically for salaried persons with the intention of giving them just and equal tax treatment. One such provision was made under Section 16 (1) of the Income Tax Act, 1961, and was popularly known as standard deduction. Unfortunately, the standard deduction provision was withdrawn by the Finance Minister in 2005.

Its abolition placed salaried persons in a disadvantageous position as compared to businessmen and professionals as the latter are entitled to claim deduction of expenditure incurred for earning their income while salaried persons are not.

According to the income tax laws, any cost incurred for earning the income is subtracted from the aggregate gross income and tax is assessed on the remaining portion of income. Following this principle, the expenditure of an individual in the course of the income-earning activity is also sought to be deducted from his income.

In the case of businessmen and professionals, there is hardly any problem in identifying expenditure which can be regarded as incidental to their business or profession. The problem arises in the case of salaried persons, since the expenditure incurred in the course of execution of duty is indirect. An empirical study of the income tax laws reveals that certain expenses of salaried persons were identified as being incurred in the course of earning the salary. Up to 1974, when the Standard Deduction was introduced, salaried persons were also entitled to claim deduction of expenditure incurred for earning salary. These expenses included expenditure on books and other publications, on conveyance and any other similar expenditure.

The conveyance deduction was granted for the first time by the Finance Act, 1968. The rate of deduction was Rs 150-250 per month for scooter or motorcycle and Rs 5 for bicycle. The Finance Act, 1969 fixed the standard deduction for car at Rs 200 per month. The standard deduction for scooter was raised to Rs 60 per month by the Finance Act, 1970. A deduction of Rs 35 per month was also prescribed for those who did not own any conveyance and used public trans-

The standard deduction was not a rebate or an incentive given to a salaried person. It was given in lieu of expenditure incurred for earning. Its existence should not depend on the mercy of the Union Finance Minister.

Comparison in the tax liability of salaried person and businessman with equal gross income

Salaried person		Businessman/Professional		
Gross Salary	Rs 3,80,000	Gross Income		Rs 3,80,000
		Less:		
		(1) Expenditure on Petrol & maintenance of car	Rs 24,000	
		(2) Interest on car loan	Rs 46,000	
		(3) Depreciation on car	Rs 60,000	Rs 1,30,000
Taxable Income	Rs 3,80,000	Taxable Income		Rs 2,50,000
Less: Deduction u/s 80C	Rs 1,00,000	Less: Deduction u/s 80C		Rs 1,00,000
Tax Liability	**Rs 21,420**			**NIL**

* Assessment Year 2008-09

port. For the assessment year 1972-73, conveyance deduction at the rate of Rs 200 per month for car, Rs 75 for motorcycle or scooter and Rs 50 in every other case was provided.

Separate deduction for expenses actually incurred by employees wholly, necessarily and exclusively in performance of duties and which were not covered under the above mentioned provisions was also provided. But the deductions for books and publications, conveyance and the like were allowed at a fixed rate and the actual expenditure incurred on these activities was not deductible.

TO simplify the assessment procedure for salaried taxpayers, it was decided that, in lieu of all these deductions, a fixed proportion of the salary may be deducted for the expenditures incurred for earning the salary. The Finance Act, 1974 substituted the above separate deductions with a fixed "standard deduction" at the rate of 20 per cent of the salary up to Rs 10,000 and 10 per cent of the salary in excess thereof, subject to a maximum deduction of Rs 3,500.

In the case of businessmen and professionals, there is hardly any problem in identifying expenditure which can be regarded as incidental to their business or profession

The percentage of salary for standard deduction and its maximum ceiling was changed from time to time. The abolition of standard deduction places the salaried persons in a disadvantageous position in comparison to businessmen and professionals. Suppose a salaried person's gross salary amounts to Rs 3,80,000 and a businessman also has the same gross income. They purchase cars, costing Rs 4,00,000 each and financed by bank loans. During the previous year they spent Rs 24,000 each on petrol and maintenance, and pay Rs 46,000 each as loan interest.

While computing the tax liability as shown in the table, the businessman claims a deduction of Rs 24,000 for expenditure on petrol and so on, Rs 46,000 for interest paid on loan taken for purchase of the car and Rs 60,000 for depreciation on the car. After investing Rs 1,00,000 under Section 80C of the Income Tax Act, his taxable income is reduced to zero. But the poor salaried person is not allowed any deduction relating to the car and is liable to pay Rs 21,420 as income tax.

The standard deduction was not a rebate or an incentive given to a salaried person. It was given in lieu of expenditure incurred for earning the salary. Therefore, it was a right and its existence should not depend on the mercy of the Union Finance Minister. The standard deduction was introduced by withdrawing all the other deductions of expenditure incidental to service, for the convenience of the tax collection machinery.

Thus, the abolition of standard deduction is arbitrary, discriminatory and inconsistent with the objective for which the provision was introduced. g

(The writer is Registrar of Companies, HP, Punjab, Chandigarh. The views are personal.)

Distant thunder

The rumblings of change in government have encouraged the people to vent unprecedented anger against mafia rule

by Diptendra Raychaudhuri

IF Dinabandhu Mitra were alive today he could have written a sequel to *Neel Darpan* (The Blue Mirror), his play about how British planters tortured poor farmers and forced them to cultivate indigo.

A century and a half later, Bengal has unearthed a parallel in a mafia gang led by Gaffar Mollah. The *modus operandi* was to bring unwilling peasants to a room in a resort called Vedic Village and coerce them to give away their land. According to the police, initially they were coaxed. When the coaxing failed, force was resorted to. The resort is in a Kolkata suburb, on the other side of the city's Eastern Metropolitan Bypass, called Rajarhat which is being developed as a township as Salt Lake has reached saturation point.

The racket, reportedly a decade old, came to light after over 10 people who lost their land moved court. They had remained quiet earlier due to fear because the local police, administration and political leaders were all in league with Raj Kishore Modi, the owner of Vedic Village and the kingpin of the racket. Gaffar Mollah was merely a henchman who had been allotted a room inside the resort to carry out his mission. The move to resist was triggered by a local football match. Gaffar's team lost and his goons started beating up people. This sparked anger which led to arson in the resort.

Had all this occurred six months earlier, chances are the outcome would have been different. However, the government swung into action owing to fears that the Trinamool Congress could turn the tide against it. The local media was quick on the uptake, revealing that some young Ministers had close connections with Vedic Village, and that even Minister Rezzak Mollah was a regular visitor. Rezzak, who garnered the limelight a few years ago for his opposition to largescale transfer of agricultural land to industry, presides over a department, Land and Land Reforms, that illegally gave land to Vedic Village. However, Rezzak claimed it was done during the tenure of his predecessor, Surjakanta Mishra.

Trinamool Congress chief Mamata Banerjee expelled three local leaders for involvement in the racket. The party's local MLA, Arabul Hossein, is also linked to it as his brother, Khude, was Gaffar's righthand man. Gaffar was arrested while on the run weeks after the football match but Khude is still absconding.

Another government department was also involved. The IT department had acquired land in that area for Wipro and Infosys through Gaffar, who had used the same *modus operandi*. Even the land transfer was not done in a transparent manner. The department stated that the projects were being cancelled, as the government did not want to be involved with illegal activities. In the process, Minister Debesh Das earned the wrath of the Chief Minister. To appease the CM, the Left Front then decided that the project would not be cancelled, but kept in abeyance.

Next, it was discovered that Gaffar and his men had grabbed even land belonging to the Rajarhat Development Authority in Bhangar.

All this is proof of the extent of the

Mass resistance to the political mafia was triggered by a local football match. Gaffar's team lost and his goons started beating up people. This sparked anger which led to arson.

REUTERS

Over a dozen bureaucrats have sought transfer outside the State and more are thinking of following suit. Another section has crossed over to the Mamata Banerjee camp. Chief Minister Buddhadev Bhattacharya appears resigned to fate.

Mass Trinamool rally in Kolkata: chilling message for the *ancien regime*

scandal. First, Gaffar – as Modi's henchman – could acquire land anywhere and manipulate government records. The administration was working as a subsidiary of the land mafia. Second, the local police was also in league with the mafia. The reign of terror prevented the farmers from lodging complaints or holding protests. According to sources, top police officials are investigating the extent of involvement of the local *thana* and trying to pinpoint the policemen who were hand-in-glove with Modi and Gaffar. Third, the political connection, which is not likely to be unearthed, played a significant role.

In recent months, the mafia had become so bold that they did not hesitate to flex their muscles over just a football match. This was probably because, since the Lok Sabha election, West Bengal has plunged into total non-governance. The government appears to have withdrawn from the scene in every sphere. All major investment plans have been shelved. Over a dozen bureaucrats have sought transfer outside the State and more are thinking of following suit. Another section has crossed over to the Mamata Banerjee camp. These bureaucrats, like some police officers, are not willing to do anything that might irk the Trinamool leader. Chief Minister Buddhadev Bhattacharya appears resigned to fate.

Gaffar Mollah (right) and henchmen after arrest: the VIP connections

The situation is taking its toll on the lives of the people. Supporters of the CPI(M) and Trinamool or Congress supporters regularly clash in various parts of the State. Murders are commonplace. Despite the offensive launched by the State police and the Central paramilitary against the Maoists in Lalgarh and other adjacent areas, no big catch has been made. On the contrary, since the offensive started, over 30 CPI(M) cadres have been butchered by the Maoists. In rural areas, allegations abound of non-payment of wages in the "100 days work" project, and every week sees a labourers' revolt or gherao of panchayat leaders or administrative officers somewhere. In Narayanpur, Murshidabad district, labourers recently claimed they had not received wages for seven months.

The power situation is so bad that Congress workers have started an agitation. They are regularly humiliating the office workers of the State Electricity Board who have little role to play in either deterioration or improvement of the situation. Other government workers are similarly heckled. In each case, the police is a silent spectator.

An old High Court order bans public transport over 15 years old but the government has failed to plan or execute an alternative. Commuters are paying the price. People are also revolting against the pitiful public health system. In one instance, the authorities of a district government hospital have put up a notice asking doctors to show empathy with patients.

These recent signs of unrest do not mean that the State was better off earlier. It is just that the prospect of a change in government has encouraged the people to protest. But the current dispensation will continue till May 2011 and the situation could worsen even further, into complete anarchy. g

Killing fields of KAI

About three dozen tribal hamlets of Kaimur hills of Bihar are in the clutches of Naxalism. gfiles visited that remote region, where non-tribals are not allowed to move freely. Women and children are getting training in camps to handle sophisticated arms and ammunition in the name of justice and liberation

by Amarendra Kishore

'The children of Kaimur tribals learn lessons in Naxalism before they learn the alphabet. They may not know of the heroes in Indian history or even the name of the Prime Minister but they know the leaders of various outfits.'

IN the three dozen tribal hamlets that dot the Kaimur hills of Bihar's Rohtas district, killings – mass killings – are a way of life. The area's dense forests and gushing waterfalls form a beauteous panorama that belies the Naxalite menace it cradles. This is the place where, under the tutelage of tribal Maoists deprived of governance and its concomitant benefits like development, 13-year-olds are trained to operate SLRs, light machine guns, Insas rifles, AK-47s and .303s. All over the 2,500-sq km area of the Kaimur hills and the lowlying area that is skirted by a sandy ravine created by the Sone river, villagers recall the brutal killing of Divisional Forest Officer Sanjay Singh by women guerrillas four years ago in the dense forest near Rehal village.

Kaimur's dense forests have harboured some of India's most impoverished tribes, who are now fuelling the Naxalite inferno. For two decades, while the government made unsuccessful attempts to root them out, the Maoists spread their tentacles until they declared the entire region a liberated zone.

The Maoist Coordination Committee holds sway here, through underground subgroups Krantikari Kisan Committee (KKC), the Red Defence Corps, and the Youth and Women Fronts. The General Secretary, the top functionary of the organization, heads the Central Committee, the highest decision-making body. There are Zonal Committees, Sub-Zonal Committees, Regional Committees and Village Committees. There is also a military wing.

The squads on the ground, consisting of some 15-20 cadres each, are estimated at about 50 by the police. The police is on the backfoot here, outdone by the guerrillas. "They use hit-and-run techniques to attack police stations and pickets," said Vikas Vaibabh, Superintendent of Police, Rohtas.

The police is also deterred by landmines. "The MCC acquired technology for manufacturing and implanting landmines from the People's War Group (PWG), which in turn had got it from the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) of Sri Lanka," says the SP.

The guerrillas generally target contractors, government officials and, sometimes, senior officials of rural banks. They are involved in kidnapping, arson and sabotage of public property.

The Maoist leaders are unchallenged. Kameshwar Baitha alias Udheshwar Singh, chief of the CPI (ML), operated in these hills for 12 years before he was nabbed by the police. Sudama Oraon controls a 40-sq km area in Nauhatta and Rohtas, while Birendra Rana wields influence in the 30 sq km from Adhaura to Chenari. "Sudama is our leader, our godfather, who is very sympathetic to the plight of Kaimur's tribals. If he tells us to die, we are ready to obey," declared a Kharwar tribal woman of Piperdih village, with blazing eyes.

"The children of Kaimur tribals learn

IMUR

PHOTOS: AMARENDRA KISHORE & MANOJ SINGH

Feeling of isolation from the national mainstream prevails. The region is untouched by development.

THE SEEDS OF NAXALISM

Till the end of the 1970s, development agents in the guise of teachers, contractors, Village Level Workers (VLWs), *vaidyas* of government dispensaries, and social workers were the sole elements who accessed the Kaimur hills and stayed there to serve – or exploit. The Octavius Steel Company and, after Independence, ML Dalmiya & Company Limited used to run a narrow gauge railway from Dehri-on-Sone to Tiuara Piparadih (68 km, 14 stations). The track transported the cheapest tribal labour and limestone for cement production from quarries in the Kaimur hills to the Kalyanpur Cement Factory of Banjari and Jain Cement Factory at Dalmianagar. No other visitors came to the region.

The Forest Policy of 1952 sounded the death knell for this region. Private contractors began to plunder the rich forests. The contractors were influential Brahmins and Rajputs, who overran the area with firearms. They felled timber by day and exploited tribal girls after sundown. Legends abound of the dancing to the music of harmoniums and drums in the timber traders' camps. There were also instances of teachers of the State Welfare Department-sponsored schools taking concubines and passing them off as unwed mothers.

During the First and Second Five-Year Plans, some buildings for residential schools, animal husbandry dispensaries, and houses for officials of the State Forest Department were constructed. A grain warehouse and a Khichhdi Centre came into being in the late 1960s. Vanvasi Sewa Kendra, an NGO, arrived to propagate sustainable economic growth of the locals with Gandhian philosophy for rural development and revival of self-dignity. Government officials would visit, ostensibly to inspect residential schools, minor relief work and plantation activity but actually to holiday in scenic Kaimur with wine and women provided by subordinate staff.

The first seeds of Naxalism were sown when Dr Vinayan, the famous Naxalite leader, came to the Kaimur hills and held several public meetings, promising the tribals justice. It was to be yet another betrayal. The Naxalites captured the forests, valley and ravines, supported by the gullible tribals who mistook them as harbingers of a better tomorrow.

lessons in Naxalism before they learn the alphabet. They may not know of the heroes in Indian history or even the name of the Prime Minister but they know the leaders of various outfits," said Rajendra Oraon, a tribal of Chandodih village who is a graduate.

THIS makes recruitment and training easy. And, in an area that lacks a girls' school, women are easy prey for recruiters. "Had they been educated, they would have thought twice before joining the ultras," says Rajbansh Singh of Hansadi village. And Mrityunjay Singh of Govindapur adds, "They are unaware of what these outfits really are." There are about 1,000 Naxalites, of whom 80 to 90 are women. The notorious Vinita (26), Sabita (19) and Lilawati (18) have been arrested but there are others being groomed to take their place. According to Triloki Singh of Tippa village, girls are also sexually used by the male members. Teenage girls are lured with gifts of cosmetics, sweets, chocolates and clothes. Once recruited, they are regularly given weapons training to repulse police attacks.

The training camps are in Kuba, Rehal, Korhans, Soli and Jonha under Chutia and Nauhatta police stations, and Bhavantalab, Budhua, Tardih and Nagatoli of Rohtas police station.

Villagers say a general feeling of isolation from the national mainstream prevails. The region is untouched by development. The tribals have to hike 14 km to Chutia Bazaar to procure edible salt. The barter system is still in force and 1 kg of chiraunji (*Buchanania latifolia*) is exchanged for the same quantity of salt. There is no infrastructure for communication, drinking water, irrigation, and electricity has yet to reach these one lakh voters. These factors and the non-existence of a market, the Public Distribution System, a dispensary, a primary health centre and a primary school for girls are fodder for Naxalites.

Drought, poverty and corruption are rampant. A huge population is barely subsisting on cultivation, food gathering, animal husbandry and Kendu leaf collection during the scorching summer. In such circumstances, they cannot achieve food security.

The Kaimur hills have only one thing – a road, built for transport of Kendu leaves by truck during summer. During

Guerilla training: police nightmare

the rains, from mid-June to start of September, the road is unused.

The tribals were always governed by the upper castes of the plains, who were timber traders. They also exploited the tribal girls. In tribal society, it was considered prestigious to have sexual relations with outsiders. This turned the region into a virtual redlight area. Today, in the age of Panchayati Raj, the exploitation and human degradation is unabated. "In the Kaimur hills, the pace of development was painfully slow. So, first dacoits and then the Naxalites captured the area," recounts Bashishth Kumar Singh, a Sasaram-based lawyer.

"We are trying our best to bring the tribals into the mainstream," says District Magistrate M Saravanan but neither he nor the Chief Minister has visited the area to see for themselves the sight of gun-toting tribals. The previous DM, Bishwanath Singh, had never heard of the Kaimur hills and was unaware that Maoists were running a parallel government there.

"Through the *Sarkar aapke Dwar* (Government at your Doorstep) programme, the government plans to bring development to the people, particularly to the underprivileged sections," says the current DM airily. The government's stated intention is rehabilitation in the mainstream and income generation, but the local administration has no blueprint to achieve this.

One of the main hurdles the police faces is topography. The Kaimur hills touch the borders of UP and Madhya Pradesh and across the Sone lies Jharkhand, whose formation triggered a migration of Naxalites from there to this region. After Chutia, where the Sone demarcates Bihar and Jharkhand, no sign of development can be perceived. With communication very poor the Naxalites roam freely. Now, says the police, awareness campaigns are being conducted among the villagers to bring them into the mainstream. The police is also being more sensitive. "We found that villagers were being made scapegoats. So we started going in for qualitative arrests rather than quantitative. At once, the people's faith was restored and they are joining hands with the police against the Naxalites," says Vaibabh.

But the police faces a long haul. No outsider can enter Barkhoh and Jogi Kund, the places where huge stocks of arms and ammunition are stored. These places are encircled by jungle-covered hills and snaking rivulets. "We cannot establish any police post in these hills since they will be looted in broad daylight. The Naxalites move in huge numbers with sophisticated arms. They will come just to loot our weapons." A police party visits the region once or twice a week – unannounced in order to avert planting of landmines.

"There is no police in the area. Once the police enters, it will become a war zone like Bastar district of Chhattisgarh," says Prabhat Pandey, a journalist from Bandu village in Rohtas. g

AGRARIAN BRUTALITY

The Brahmin-Rajput influence also played a role in the Kaimur saga. It spawned caste-based criminals Chhatu Chaube, CID Mishra, Baban Mishra and their ilk while, on the other side of the divide, the dominant Koiri, Dusadh, Kurmi and Kahar communities used to capture polling booths and control the crime-graph of the entire district for the Brahmin and Rajput godfathers. The Brahmins of Bandoo, Manjhigawan, Nauhatta, Khairwa and Singhpur villages would despatch arms and ammunition to other districts to abet gang robberies and get a share of the booty. The Rajputs of Tippa, Balbhadrapur and Bhadara villages imposed a reign of terror with their rifles. In retaliation, Koiri, Dusadh, Kurmi and Kahar youngsters united and stockpiled sophisticated arms to wipe out the influence of the upper castes. Some youths also took up arms against government-supported Brahmin clout and sought shelter in the Kaimur forests, descending into the lowlying areas to kill Rajputs. A report says they killed over 160 Rajputs within six years.

Then there were dacoits like Mohan Bind or Raja, Bhim, Ghamari Kharwar and Dadwa. They were eccentric rebels who killed a number of innocent people from the plains. Eventually, they became exploiters of the forests and tribals, and hindered development. They also became infamous for sexual exploitation of the tribal women. In the 1990s, after Raja's death, development work was forced to a halt as the rebels began to demand a huge slice of the development fund. In 1987, Sudarshan Prasad Singh, then SP, took the initiative to analyse the psychology of these rebels and, within three months, Kaimur became free of crime. The Rohtas police also killed Chhangur Dusadh, a dreaded criminal close to a Lok Dal leader.

In general, Rohtas' agrarian society was known for brutality. Prior to the 1980s, the Kaimur tribals were forced into bonded labour for Brahmin and Rajput landlords. The latter had connections with national politicians and a vice-like grip at the local level. Mass killings, rape, hooliganism and booth-capturing were commonplace. A virtual curfew would be declared on election day and the public would be told there was no need to come to the polling booths since "your vote has already been cast".

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INSIDE THE GOVERNMENT

vishnu bhagwan

'My strength was that I

The former Chief Secretary of Haryana looks back on 35 years in the IAS

I was named by my mother, who was very religious. She named my brothers Sri Bhagwan and Ved Bhagwan. After one of them died, her mindset altered and my youngest brother was named Brijender. I belong to a Vaishya community but never added this to my name. When my father, an advocate, admitted me to school, he entered my name as Vishnu Bhagwan Aggarwal. I asked him to let it be Vishnu Bhagwan. Nobody in Haryana knew that I belong to a Vaishya community. That benefited me a lot in caste-ridden India.

I was always very good in studies, standing first in my class. I studied at Ramjas School, Chandni Chowk, Delhi as we lived in Naya Bazaar. I topped the school in Class VIII. I did BA (Economics) from St Stephen's College and MA (Economics) from Delhi School of Economics, but secured a second division both times. I joined LLB classes and started preparing for the civil services exam. My father had always wanted me to pass the IAS exam. I appeared the first time in 1962 but could not make it. I think my options, economics and history, were not scoring. In 1964, I got admission in IIM, Ahmedabad. The schedule was so tight that I could not get time to prepare for the civil service exam. So I quit IIM and returned to Delhi. In 1964, I appeared for the IAS exam with law and economics as my main papers and passed.

In 1965, after completing training, I was allotted to the Punjab cadre. We joined service with missionary zeal. When I was about to join, the decision to divide Punjab was in the offing. I joined at Hissar, where my Deputy Commissioner was SK Mishra. My first independent posting was as SDM, Hansi. In 1966, Haryana was carved out of Punjab. The officers were allotted to the state they happened to be working in. I was allotted to Haryana.

After Hansi, I went as Deputy Commissioner to Bhiwani. Bansi Lal was then a young leader. I was his returning officer when he contested the Assembly election in 1968. I worked 20 years in Haryana and 15 years in Delhi with the Central government.

Haryana had been the backwaters of Punjab. Haryana postings were treated as punishment postings. Once Haryana had its own CM, fast development took place. The state developed under the dynamic leadership of Bansi Lal. He changed the perception about Haryana. He gave responsibility to young officers, and they worked fast. He was CM the first time for eight years. He was very meticulous. He moved from village to village along with officials, especially irrigation department officials. He knew more than the Secretary, Irrigation. After every visit he would hold meetings and instruct officers about the work to be done in various villages. He would ask officials to submit financial plans, implementation plans and human resource to work in the fields. He would order that the work be started at once.

As young officers, we ate *dhaba* food. Under Bansi Lal, Haryana came on to the tourism map. Good eating joints opened. He would issue orders and nobody dared speak. He was an autocrat.

I worked in the Agriculture Ministry. When Bhajan Lal was about to become Agriculture Minister, some department officials were apprehensive of working with him. When he did become Agriculture Minister, I became Joint Secretary, Policy and Planning. I asked an officer why he was afraid if he had never worked with Bhajan Lal before. I told him that Bhajan Lal would never pressure him to work against his will. "Most of the time, he will say do this work, and if you are not able to do it, he will not ask about it. But if some work has to be done by all means, he will call you and ask you to do it. If you say it can't be done, he will say, 'Fine, you write your comments on the file and I will over-

Haryana postings were treated as punishment postings. Once Haryana had its own CM, fast development took place. The state developed under the dynamic leadership of Bansi Lal. He gave responsibility to young officers, and they worked fast.

I never sought postings'

Vishnu Bhagwan with his wife: a conscience at ease

RAJEEV DABRAL

rule.' So where is the problem?" I said. Many years later, that officer told me I had been right.

My most memorable work was done when Haryana had a disastrous flood in September 1995. I was Secretary, Irrigation and Power. I worked day and night and provided whatever was needed. The Chief Minister, Bhajan Lal, gave me everything I required. The successive government under Bansi Lal also took note of my good work.

When Bansi Lal was elected CM the second time, he suddenly became very fond of me. He would call me several times a day. I knew my limitations so I kept a low profile. There were discussions among bureaucrats close to him, but he did not listen to them. He appointed me Secretary, Education. I fully enjoyed this posting. I used to say, "Why have I not worked in this department earlier?" Another posting I enjoyed was in the Agriculture Ministry. I went to Rome as India's representative in the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO). I travelled a lot in that part of Europe.

I also worked as Principal Secretary to Chief Minister Om Prakash Chautala. He has a wonderful memory and, like other Haryana CMs, he travelled the state. He launched the programme, Sarkar aapke Dwar (Government at your Doorstep). Whenever he returned from touring villages, he would call a meeting of the officers and, without help from any document, instruct them on what had to be done. He would remember names of villages, the villagers and the work needed.

I became Chief Secretary of the state for four months. Chautala wanted to appoint me earlier but somehow it was not cleared by Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee. He offered me an extension of three months but I saw no logic in staying on only for three months. After retirement, I was Vice-Chancellor of Guru Jambheshwar University.

I would like to congratulate the leadership and officers who have been instrumental in the progress of Haryana. It is much ahead of many other states.

I have enjoyed every moment of my career in the IAS. My biggest strength was that I never sought postings. And, I never hesitated to express my opinion. g

birthdays

IAS officers' birthdays | October 16, '09–November 15, '09

G Elias
16-10-1956
CADRE: KERALA
eliasg@ias.nic.in

Subhas Chandra Garg
16-10-1960
CADRE: RAJASTHAN
gargsc@ias.nic.in

Shashi Prakash
17-10-1950
CADRE: MANIPUR-TRIPURA
pshashi@ias.nic.in

Girija Sankar Patnaik
17-10-1953
CADRE: UNION TERRITORY
patnaikg@ias.nic.in

Pravin Bakshi
18-10-1979
CADRE: ASSAM-MEGHALAYA
pravinbakshi.ias@ias.nic.in

Varun Nath Maira
18-10-1952
CADRE: GUJARAT
mairavn@ias.nic.in

Ranjeev R Acharya
19-10-1958
CADRE: ANDHRA PRADESH
acharyar@ias.nic.in

Subodh Chandra Agrawal
19-10-1952
CADRE: PUNJAB
agarwlsc@ias.nic.in

Vinod Agrawal
20-10-1956
CADRE: JHARKHAND
agrawalv@ias.nic.in

Ratnaraj G Bansod
20-10-1948
CADRE: MAHARASHTRA
bansodrg@ias.nic.in

Devinder Nargotra
21-10-1948
CADRE: JAMMU & KASHMIR
nargotra@ias.nic.in

Brajendra Navnit
21-10-1974
CADRE: TAMIL NADU
navnitb@ias.nic.in

Avtar Singh
22-10-1955
CADRE: HARYANA
savtar@ias.nic.in

Sailendra Krishna Das
22-10-1952
CADRE: WEST BENGAL
skdas.ias@ias.nic.in

Shishir Priyadarshi
23-10-1957
CADRE: UTTAR PRADESH
pshishir@ias.nic.in

Dipankar Mukhopadhyay
23-10-1952
CADRE: WEST BENGAL
dmukho@ias.nic.in

Atal Dulloo
24-10-1966
CADRE: JAMMU & KASHMIR
dullooa@ias.nic.in

BR Jayaramaraja Urs
24-10-1951
CADRE: KARNATAKA
ursbrjay@ias.nic.in

KD Prasad Rao
25-10-1959
CADRE: CHHATTISGARH
koppala@ias.nic.in

Niten Chandra
25-10-1965
CADRE: ORISSA
nchandra@ias.nic.in

Lalbikat Lunga Khiangte
26-10-1964
CADRE: JHARKHAND
khiangte@ias.nic.in

Anita Das
26-10-1948
CADRE: MADHYA PRADESH
dasa@ias.nic.in

Sangeeta Singh
27-10-1960
CADRE: GUJARAT
ssingh86@ias.nic.in

RN Shastri
27-10-1949
CADRE: KARNATAKA
shastrir@ias.nic.in

Emily Das Choudhury
28-10-1953
CADRE: ASSAM-MEGHALAYA
emilydas@ias.nic.in

Manoranjan Saran
28-10-1948
CADRE: ORISSA
saranm@ias.nic.in

For the complete list, see www.indianbuzz.com

IAS officers' birthdays | October 16, '09–November 15, '09

Syed Sabahat Azim
29-10-1974
CADRE: MANIPUR-TRIPURA
azimss@ias.nic.in

Gyan Prakash Upadhyaya
29-10-1964
CADRE: SIKKIM
ugyanp@ias.nic.in

Bidhu Prasad Acharya
30-10-1960
CADRE: ANDHRA PRADESH
acharyab@ias.nic.in

TK Manojkumar
30-10-1961
CADRE: KERALA
manojktk@ias.nic.in

Raghav Chandra
31-10-1958
CADRE: MADHYA PRADESH
craghav@ias.nic.in

Manisha Shridhar
01-11-1960
CADRE: HIMACHAL PRADESH
smanisha@ias.nic.in

RN Singare
01-11-1953
CADRE: MAHARASHTRA
singarer@ias.nic.in

Bipin Bihari Srivastva
02-11-1953
CADRE: BIHAR
sbipin@ias.nic.in

Satbir Silas Bedi
02-11-1961
CADRE: UNION TERRITORY
bediss@ias.nic.in

Shruti Singh
03-11-1977
CADRE: CHHATTISGARH
shruti.ias@ias.nic.in

Niranjan Mardi
03-11-1959
CADRE: TAMIL NADU
mardin@ias.nic.in

C Ashok Vardhan
04-11-1953
CADRE: BIHAR
vardhanc@ias.nic.in

Sudha Choudhary
04-11-1955
CADRE: MADHYA PRADESH
sudhac@ias.nic.in

Sanjay Kumar Rakesh
05-11-1967
CADRE: MANIPUR-TRIPURA
rskumar1@ias.nic.in

VP Baligar
06-11-1954
CADRE: KARNATAKA
baligarv@ias.nic.in

Malay Kumar Roy
06-11-1952
CADRE: MADHYA PRADESH
roymk@ias.nic.in

Ravinder Singh Sandhu
07-11-1948
CADRE: PUNJAB
sandhurs@ias.nic.in

Purushottam Aggarwal
07-11-1954
CADRE: RAJASTHAN
aggarwlp@ias.nic.in

Shalini Mishra
08-11-1962
CADRE: ANDHRA PRADESH
mishras1@ias.nic.in

RN Joshi
08-11-1950
CADRE: GUJARAT
joshirn3@ias.nic.in

Asok Kumar Chauhan
09-11-1955
CADRE: BIHAR
casok@ias.nic.in

Tarun Bajaj
09-11-1962
CADRE: HARYANA
bajajt@ias.nic.in

Thanksy Francis Thekkakara
10-11-1953
CADRE: MAHARASHTRA
tfrancis@ias.nic.in

Godala Kiran Kumar
10-11-1975
CADRE: WEST BENGAL
godala.k.k.@ias.nic.in

Vijai Vardhan
11-11-1961
CADRE: HARYANA
vardhanv@ias.nic.in

Ajit Kumar
11-11-1977
CADRE: KERALA
ajitkumar.ias@ias.nic.in

For the complete list, see www.indianbuzz.com

IPS officers' birthdays | October 16, '09-November 15, '09

Bipin Kumar Singh
16-10-1965
CADRE: MAHARASHTRA
bksingh@mail.svpnpa.gov.in

Amit Kumar
16-10-1970
CADRE: BIHAR
amit_kumar@mail.svpnpa.gov.in

Satyapriya Singh
17-10-1975
CADRE: RAJASTHAN
satyapriya@mail.svpnpa.gov.in

MW Chitale
18-10-1949
CADRE: MAHARASHTRA
mwchitale@mail.svpnpa.gov.in

Hardish Singh Randhawa
18-10-1950
CADRE: PUNJAB
hsrandhawa@mail.svpnpa.gov.in

SC Atre
19-10-1948
CADRE: CHHATTISGARH
scatre@mail.svpnpa.gov.in

Arun Kumar Sinha
9-10-1958
CADRE: KERALA
arunkumarsinha@mail.svpnpa.gov.in

Manjari Jaruhar
20-10-1950
CADRE: JHARKHAND
manjari@mail.svpnpa.gov.in

S Gopal Reddy
20-10-1956
CADRE: JAMMU & KASHMIR
gopal@mail.svpnpa.gov.in

MT Ganeshmoorthy
20-10-1961
CADRE: TAMIL NADU
ganesamoorthy@mail.svpnpa.gov.in

SS Hansdah
21-10-1953
CADRE: ORISSA
sshansdah@mail.svpnpa.gov.in

V Vinay Kumar
21-10-1963
CADRE: UTTARAKHAND
vinaykumar@mail.svpnpa.gov.in

Biju George Joseph K
22-10-1967
CADRE: RAJASTHAN
bijugeorge@mail.svpnpa.gov.in

Santosh Macheria
23-10-1955
CADRE: MANIPUR-TRIPURA
santoshmacherla@mail.svpnpa.gov.in

Arvind Deep
23-10-1962
CADRE: AGMUT
arvindd@mail.svpnpa.gov.in

Debendra Nath Hazarika
24-10-1951
CADRE: ASSAM-MEGHALAYA
dnhazarika@mail.svpnpa.gov.in

VC Sajjanar
24-10-1968
CADRE: ANDHRA PRADESH
vcsajjanar@mail.svpnpa.gov.in

Ashok Kumar Gupta
25-10-1952
CADRE: BIHAR
a_k_gupta@mail.svpnpa.gov.in

Ayush Mani Tiwari
25-10-1971
CADRE: TAMIL NADU
amtiwari@mail.svpnpa.gov.in

Pramod Shripad Phalnikar
26-10-1962
CADRE: MADHYA PRADESH
psphalnikar@mail.svpnpa.gov.in

K Laxmi Narayan Rao
26-10-1967
CADRE: GUJARAT
klnrao@mail.svpnpa.gov.in

Sharad Kumar
28-10-1955
CADRE: HARYANA
sharadkumar@mail.svpnpa.gov.in

JB Pandit Rao
28-10-1963
CADRE: UTTAR PRADESH
panditrao@mail.svpnpa.gov.in

P Goutham Kumar
29-10-1952
CADRE: ANDHRA PRADESH
goutham@mail.svpnpa.gov.in

Pramod Verma
29-10-1971
CADRE: MADHYA PRADESH
pramodverma@mail.svpnpa.gov.in

Idashisha Nongrang
30-10-1965
CADRE: ASSAM-MEGHALAYA
inongrang@mail.svpnpa.gov.in

For the complete list, see www.indianbuzz.com

IPS officers' birthdays | October 16, '09-November 15, '09

Arvind Kumar
30-10-1966
CADRE: BIHAR
arvind_kumar@mail.svpnpa.gov.in

Rahul Sharma
31-10-1963
CADRE: GUJARAT
rahulsharma@mail.svpnpa.gov.in

Manoj Kaushik
31-10-1976
CADRE: JHARKHAND
manojkaushik@mail.svpnpa.gov.in

SN Achumi
01-11-1951
CADRE: NAGALAND
snachumi@mail.svpnpa.gov.in

Abhay Kumar Prasad
01-11-1965
CADRE: UTTAR PRADESH
abhaykp@mail.svpnpa.gov.in

Tarini Prasad Das
02-11-1955
CADRE: ANDHRA PRADESH
tpdass@mail.svpnpa.gov.in

Tarun Baron Roy
02-11-1955
CADRE: MANIPUR-TRIPURA
tbroy@mail.svpnpa.gov.in

Anil M Navaney
03-11-1952
CADRE: CHHATTISGARH
amnavaney@mail.svpnpa.gov.in

HN Siddanna
03-11-1947
CADRE: KARNATAKA
hnsiddanna@mail.svpnpa.gov.in

Ramesh P Singh
04-11-1958
CADRE: ORISSA
rameshsingh@mail.svpnpa.gov.in

Suman Bala Sahoo
04-11-1963
CADRE: WEST BENGAL
sbalasahoo@mail.svpnpa.gov.in

RL Sood
05-11-1950
CADRE: HIMACHAL PRADESH
rlsood@mail.svpnpa.gov.in

Chhaya Sharma
05-11-1971
CADRE: AGMUT
chhaya@mail.svpnpa.gov.in

Abhijit Dutta
06-11-1952
CADRE: SIKKIM
dutta@mail.svpnpa.gov.in

Nirmal Singh Dhillon
06-11-1954
CADRE: PUNJAB
nsdhillon@mail.svpnpa.gov.in

GM Hyath
07-11-1952
CADRE: KARNATAKA
gmhayath@mail.svpnpa.gov.in

Kuldeep Singh Sihag
07-11-1962
CADRE: HARYANA
kssihag@mail.svpnpa.gov.in

Shriniwas Vashisht
08-11-1955
CADRE: HARYANA
svashisht@mail.svpnpa.gov.in

Neeraj Gotru Rao
08-11-1969
CADRE: GUJARAT
neerajgotru@mail.svpnpa.gov.in

SJ Dharmadhikari
09-11-1966
CADRE: KARNATAKA
sjdharmadhikari@mail.svpnpa.gov.in

Baljit Singh
09-11-1972
CADRE: JHARKHAND
baljit@mail.svpnpa.gov.in

Prashant Kumar - II
10-11-1975
CADRE: UTTAR PRADESH
kprashant@mail.svpnpa.gov.in

Suhas Mushukar Warke
10-11-1971
CADRE: MAHARASHTRA
smwarke@mail.svpnpa.gov.in

N Achutha Rao
11-11-1951
CADRE: KARNATAKA
nachutharao@mail.svpnpa.gov.in

Jiwan Chandra Pandey
11-11-1953
CADRE: UTTARAKHAND
jcpandey@mail.svpnpa.gov.in

Rajinder Singh
12-11-1955
CADRE: PUNJAB
rajinder@mail.svpnpa.gov.in

For the complete list, see www.indianbuzz.com

TRACKING

For a complete list of appointments & retirements, see www.indianbuzz.com

KARAM VIR SINGH
The 1975-batch IPS officer has been appointed Director General of Police (DGP) by the UP government.

RANI JADHAV
The 1970-batch IAS officer of the Maharashtra cadre is now Chairman of the Tariff Authority for Major Ports.

VM GOPALA MENON
The 1994-batch IAS officer of the Kerala cadre has become Director, Census in the RGI.

UMESH SINHA
The 1986-batch IAS officer will now be Chief Electoral Officer in Uttar Pradesh.

ANJALI PRASAD
The 1983-batch IAS officer of the Uttarakhand cadre is now Joint Secretary in the Department of Industrial Policy and Promotion.

AK MANGOTRA
The 1978-batch IAS officer of the Maharashtra cadre has become Additional Secretary and FA, Food in the Department of Food and Public Distribution.

KN BHUTIA
The 1995-batch IAS officer of the Sikkim cadre has been appointed Secretary to the Sikkim Governor.

GOVINDAN NAIR
The 1978-batch IAS officer of the UP cadre is now MD of the National Cooperatives Development Corporation with the rank of Additional Secretary.

BIRENDRA SINGH
The 1988-batch IAS officer of the Haryana cadre has taken over as DC of Chandigarh.

RAJWANT SANDHU
The 1975-batch IAS officer of the Himachal Pradesh cadre is now Secretary, Drinking Water in the Government of India.

ASHISH BAHUGUNA
The 1978-batch IAS officer of the Rajasthan cadre is now Additional Secretary, Agriculture in the Government of India.

ALOK PERTI
The 1975-batch IAS officer of the Assam-Meghalaya cadre has been appointed Additional Secretary, Coal in the Government of India.

BIRENDRA SINGH
The 1988-batch IAS officer of the Haryana cadre has taken over as DC of Chandigarh.

RANJAN CHATTERJEE
The 1976-batch IAS officer has been appointed Consultant in the Planning Commission for three years.

RAJESH KUMAR
The 1988-batch IAS officer of the Maharashtra cadre has been appointed Executive Director in the Food Corporation of India.

S VASUDEVA RAO
The 1986-batch IPS officer of the UT cadre is now Chief Vigilance Officer in the Dredging Corporation of India, Visakhapatnam.

VINOD AGGARWAL
The 1980-batch IAS officer of the Jharkhand cadre, Joint Secretary in the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment, has become Chief Vigilance Officer in Engineers India Limited.

BK AGGARWAL
The 1985-batch IAS officer of the Himachal Pradesh cadre is now Resident Commissioner of Himachal Pradesh in New Delhi.

ALKA DIWAN
The 1998-batch IAS officer of the Union Territory cadre, who is Additional Secretary to the Delhi CM, has been given additional charge as Director, Public Relations.

A SHANKAR RAO
The 1987-batch IPS officer of the Sikkim cadre has been transferred to Delhi as OSD, Tourism, Sikkim House.

SL BHAT
The 1976-batch IAS officer of the J&K cadre has been appointed Chairman of the J&K Public Service Commission.

JASPREET TALWAR
The 1995-batch IAS officer of Punjab has been appointed Deputy Director in the LBSNAA, Mussoorie.

VISHWAPATI TRIVEDI
The1977-batch IAS officer of the Madhya Pradesh cadre who is Additional Secretary & FA (Home) has been allotted additional charge as Additional Secretary (Finance) in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

DHARITRI PANDA
The 1987-batch ICAS officer has been posted as Chief Controller of Accounts in the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, Government of India.

ARUN MISHRA
The 1986-batch IAS officer of the West Bengal cadre has joined as India's representative at the International Civil Aviation Organization, Montreal.

Moving On: ias and ips officers retiring in October 2009

ANDHRA PRADESH
RP Agrawal (1972)
APVN Sarma (1974)

GUJARAT
RR Solanki (1994)

HARYANA
Dharam Vir (1974)
Sajjan Singh (1979)

KARNATAKA
Neerja Rajkumar (1972)
Dilip Rau (1972)

MAHARASHTRA
DN Khamatkar (1991)
KB Lavekar (1994)

NAGALAND
Ayamo Jami (1992)

RAJASTHAN
Kushal Singh (1974)

UTTAR PRADESH
Pradeep Kumar (1973)
Ram Saran Verma (1990)
Ram Surat Dubey (1992)
Chandra Prakash (1996)
Rajendra Prasad (1996)

UNION TERRITORY
N Balachandran (1990)

ips

BIHAR
Ashish R Sinha (1972)

JHARKHAND
HK Mishra (1984)

KERALA
Paul Leslie (1984)

MAHARASHTRA
MW Chitale (1980)

ORISSA
Deshraj Meena (1977)

UTTAR PRADESH
Ajai Singh (1972)

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Ignore the Sensex, follow stocks

THE markets have crossed yet another landmark when the Sensex crossed 16000 and the bull run appears not to be receding. But a correction usually comes when it is least expected. The continued flow of positive news from abroad and within the country has further bolstered sentiment. The positive US economic data coupled with good IIP numbers and now the advance tax data suggest that corporate earnings are likely to be robust for the September quarter.

India is recovering faster than other emerging markets with GDP estimates for the country being regularly revised upwards by most international agencies and leading experts. This, coupled with a definitive agenda for economic and other reforms being pursued by the government vigorously and increased financial openness, has made the Indian market more attractive for FIIs. Moreover, low growth in the West with loose monetary policy has witnessed increased liquidity flows to countries like India which appear to be the best risk-adjusted return market.

Although agricultural activity is likely to be adversely affected due to the weak monsoon, high government spending will ensure that the consumption story remains strong. But the steady increase in rate of inflation may put pressure on interest rates which may witness a reversal in the central bank's policy. The slow pace of recovery in the US, Europe and Japan has deprived India of any major breakthrough in exports. And it is said that demand expansion in emerging economies such as China, India and Brazil may not be able to compensate for the demand contraction in these economies. We are likely to witness low growth with inflation. This will make central banks and the government postpone exit from the stimulus packages keeping the level of liquidity high in the system to fuel an asset price boom. But the asset price will remain high only as long as optimism about a global recovery is high. Any weakness anywhere could lead to a big sell-off.

Small investors, by and large, seem to have missed the bus and wish to know if this is the right time to enter the markets or they should wait for the correction. Also, investors who were lucky enough to enter the markets in time are seen to be booking profits quickly whenever they see even 20-25 per cent appreciation in the stocks they were holding on to. Investors appear to be concerned more with the movement of the Sensex than with concentrating on individual stocks.

The common mistake is to be swayed by the extremes – selling in panic when the prices fall sharply and buying anything or everything in euphoria

I have personally never followed the Sensex when it comes to buying or selling an individual stock. I firmly believe that there are always good stocks to pick or sell, irrespective of the Sensex level. Investors should therefore target the stocks that offer value with a long-term perspective and invest in them in a staggered manner. The common mistake that most investors make is to be swayed by the extremes – selling in panic when the prices fall sharply and buying anything or everything in euphoria. The analysts also justify such movements of the market with fancy arguments.

In the present scenario, investors need to be abundantly cautious since the markets are likely to correct if the earnings upgrade does not happen very soon.

HCL Infosys

(CMP Rs 155)

HCL Info's net sales for 2009 remained flat at Rs 12,378 crore and the operating profit margin (OPM) declined by 30 points. The net income dropped by 20.1 per cent y-o-y to Rs 239.9 crore due to poor operating performance and lower other income (Rs 10.8 crore in financial year 2009 vs Rs 49.9 crore in 2008). But the worst seems to be over, including some big write-offs, and the company is witnessing a recovery in the computer system and other related product business driven by the enterprise segment and system integration (SI) space. Further, in the telecom and office automation business, the company is witnessing great opportunities in the education vertical. It is re-branding its laptops and net books series under the ME brand, eyeing a 20 per cent market share as against the present 7 per cent. The company is planning to raise funds aggregating Rs 825 crore – Rs 500 crore through qualified institutional placements (QIP) and Rs 325 crore through warrant conversion by the promoters.

The company has already paid three interim (quarterly) dividends aggregating to Rs 5 per share (250 per cent) during the year and has recommended final dividend of Rs 1.50 per share (75 per cent). At the current market price, the stock is trading at 10 times the financial year 2009 earnings and offers a dividend yield of over 5 per cent. A safe bet under the current market conditions. g

The author has no exposure in the stock recommended in this column. gfiles does not accept responsibility for investment decisions by readers of this column. Investment-related queries may be sent to gfilesindia@gmail.com with Dr Sood's name in the subject line.

No end to Krishna's woes

SENIOR-LEVEL rumblings within the bureaucratic establishment have resulted in some more clipping of the wings of SM Krishna, the high-flying External Affairs Minister. He does not enjoy the sweeping

ILLUSTRATIONS: ARUNA

command and control of his predecessor, Pranab Mukherjee, in foreign policy. There's a reason. The country's security establishment has been looking askance at Krishna's grip on details of the conduct of external affairs, especially concerning neighbours.

The Minister is one of three members of the Cabinet Committee on Security, the others being the PM and the Defence Minister. When Mukherjee was part of this apex body, senior bureaucrats breathed easy because of his experience and dexterity. Krishna is considered a novice. So a decision has been made quietly to assign day-to-day handling of SAARC affairs to National Security Adviser MK Narayanan and his staff.

The brouhaha over his making a 5-star hotel his official domicile is not the only development that has added an extra furrow to the brow of the suave, tennis-playing former CM of Karnataka.

Double whammy for UP's babus

UP secretariat employees are facing unusual problems these days. To save energy, the air-conditioners in most departments are turned off after 6.30 pm. This would have been fine, had the staff managed to leave by that time. But, these days, with most of the Secretaries and Principal Secretaries staying late, the staff too has to stay back. But, while the bosses manage to keep their ACs on, the staff has

to make do with fans. The Sachivalaya Karmachari Sangh has complained.

Two months ago, the Secretariat (including the famous fifth floor where the Chief Minister's Office is located) had seen an agitation when the employees protested against their bosses in the CMO for working till late at night and on holidays. They complained that it was affecting the employees' health and their family life. Then too the secretariat employees union had asked the Secretaries and Principal Secretaries to stop work after 6.30 pm.

On the North-east fringe

PERHAPS the average citizen is aware of the existence of a Department of the Northeast in the Union Home Ministry. However, if he or she is not aware, there is little amiss. Because even the officers in the department wonder why they are there. Nagaland or Manipur are not blissfully peaceful places. But the Home Minister or Home Secretary hardly listens to the advice of the department. The officers feel expenditure on publicity about Manipur to make people aware of its problems and prospects is justifiable. The State's achievement in sports should be highlighted. But the proposal has been turned down. The Northeast is truly removed from the mainstream.

Common effort for Commonwealth Games?

THOUGH money is no concern to ensure the success of the Commonwealth Games in Delhi, there seems to be no united effort towards this even though there is only a year to go. Many of the stadia, shooting ranges and other venues are not yet ready for upgrading to international level in the next few months. Forty thousand rooms are required, but there is still a shortage of 41 per cent.

One wonders whether there is proper coordination between the Central Home Secretary, Sports

Secretary and other officials of the Delhi government. If the PM or other high-level functionaries call a meeting, the concerned departments send those officers who cannot do anything beyond noting down the instructions. So, citizens had better keep their fingers crossed for the Commonwealth Games' success. g

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